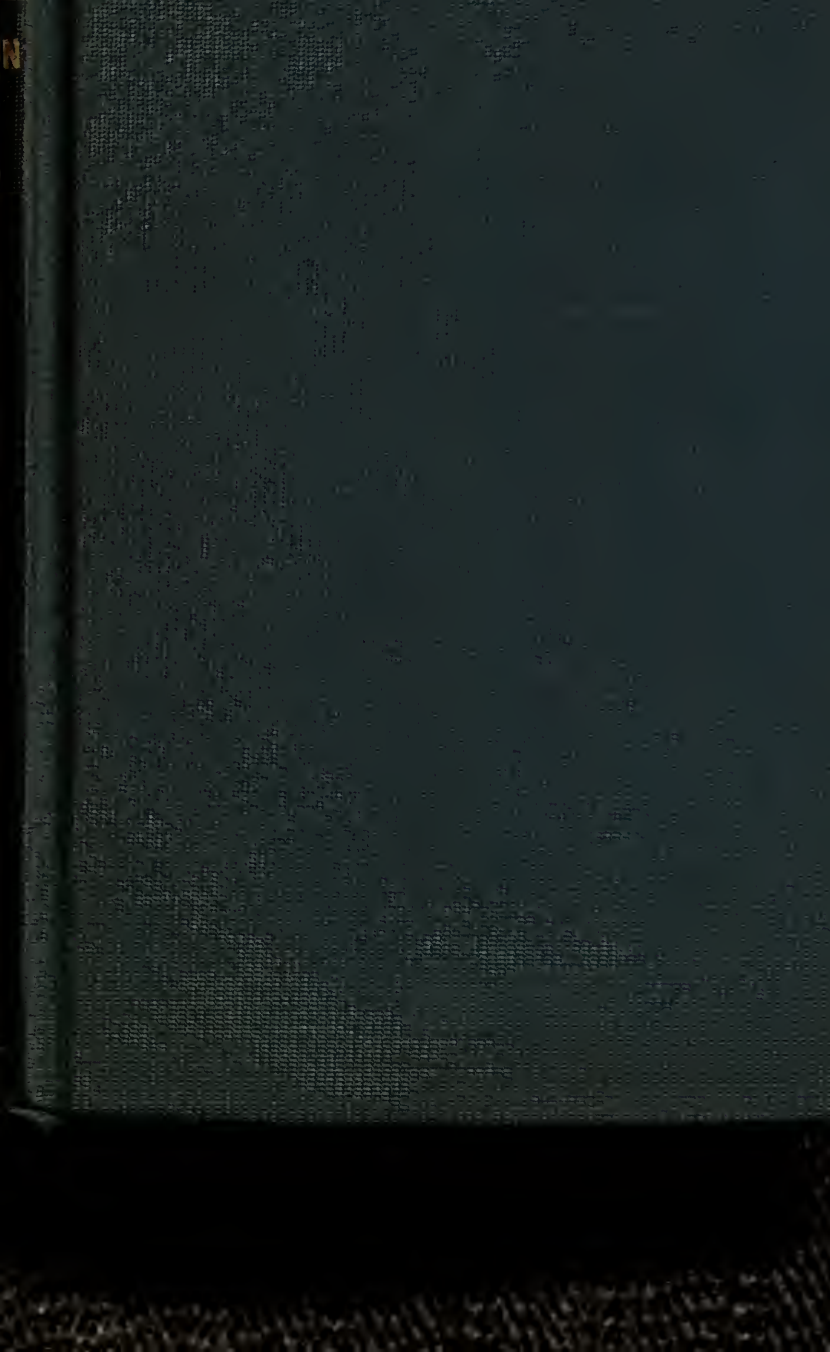

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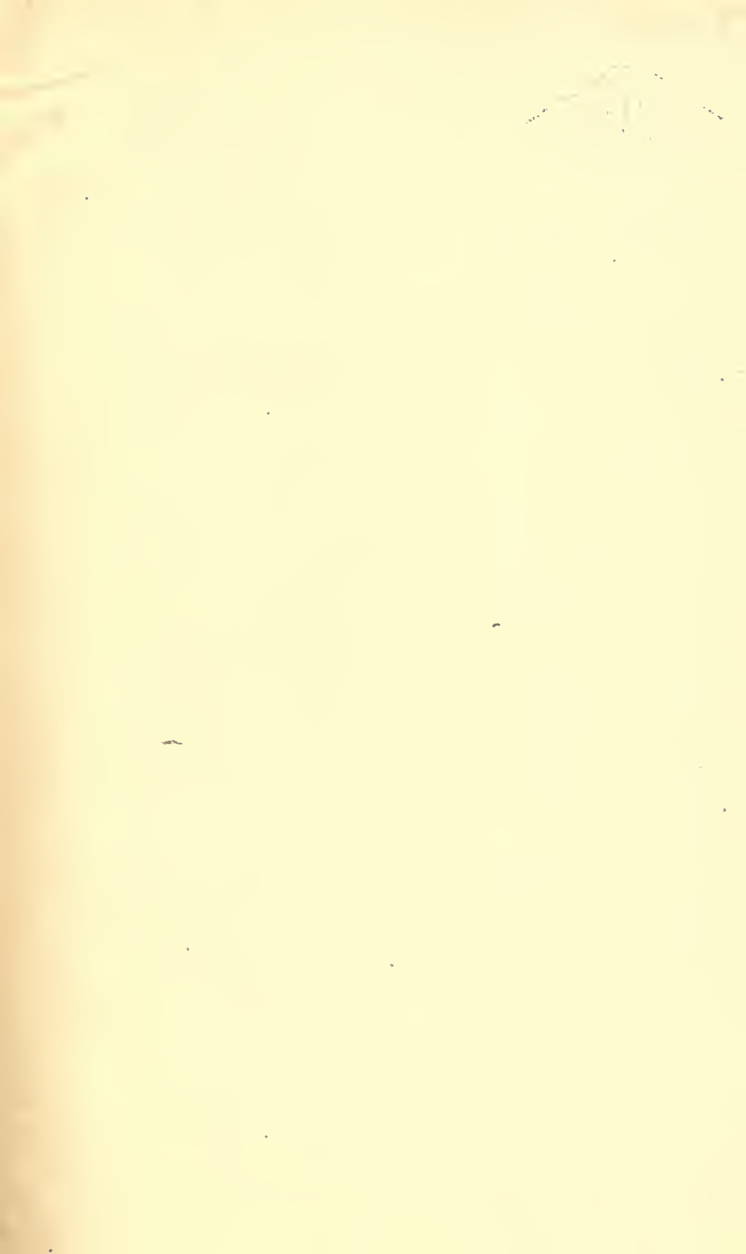

PAN'S MOUNTAIN

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES
(PRINCESS TROUBETZKOY)

"The blood, the blood that flows through the veins of men
As rivers through meadows flow,
The blood was jealous of all the birds' sweet songs,
And said, 'How I shall sing!'
The blood was jealous of all the wild winds' songs,
And said, 'How I shall sing!'"
—From *The Bard of The Dimbovitza*

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BOOKS BY

AMÉLIE RIVES

(PRINCESS TROUBETZKOY)

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TO

MY MOTHER

WITH ABIDING LOVE AND GRATITUDE

Upon an evening in the month of May,
When from the heavens like a burning tear
The sun dropped down,
Then did the blood awaken in the veins
Of the young maiden wandering through the fields.
Then the blood cried to her,
And the blood burned in her,
And, as it burned within her, thus it spake:
"What art thou making, maiden, of thy youth?
What wilt thou make of me?
I tire of this light tripping to and fro,
This idle running through thy strong young frame,
Now, would I fain stand still and do my work;
And mark, when thou shalt see
This work of thine own flesh, thy blood renewed,
Then shalt thou thank the blood that gave thee this."
So the blood burned within her,
And thus it cried to her.
And there beside the maize-field,
The other one was waiting,
He—the mysterious one.

In the month of May, at even,
The sun drops down from heaven
Heavily, like a tear.

—From "The Bard of The Dimbovitza."

PAN'S MOUNTAIN

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CHAPTER I

SCARRED, stained, with that look of blended gloom and gayety that one sees sometimes in the faces of the aged who have lived roundly, the old house, leaning backward a little among its supporting rocks, stared down upon the valley and the shining lake.

The corrugated line of its tiled eaves lent it a certain air of petulance, as of one frowning against the sun, and from beneath peered its small, deep-socketed eye-windows. It was a house with a personality, with a character, with an expression of its own. And its charm was that of the irregular beauty who has kept the magic of sex against time and against disease.

The winds and rains that had helped to crumble it had woven also a dim veil of lovely hues across its peeling stucco. Birds quickened its curtains of thick vines, and bees filled its blossoming coigns and hollows with their low bourdonment till one thought of a great shell stranded upon the

mountains and still full of the far-off humming of the sea.

At its back the village curs barked and the village children shouted, and the dull "toc toc" of the wooden balls in games of *boccie* could be heard on festas and Sundays. But in front and on both sides its own queer gardens rambled and sprawled and fell sheer to the white road, upon which one looked out through an old, old iron gate, which was always locked, upon which one thumped for admittance with an iron knocker even more ancient, and of which Cecca carried the key in her petticoat of dark-green fustian.

Once through this gate, with the sharp pebbles of the ascent scattering back beneath one's tread, the witchcraft of the place was upon one. The "aura," the "ambiente," of the old house, dominant and feminine, soaked through and through with the personalities of those who had been born and who had died there, this "orrenda," as the Iroquois would say, closed in about one, palpable to the finer senses, a thing that touched one as music, as the gathering of a storm touches one. One, as it were, came "in touch" with the brooding house, and felt that eerie sense of unreasoning expectation of things about to happen.

This first slope of the garden was very dark and dank, and smelled always like autumn woods after rain. The strangest mingling of palms

and old tree-box tented out the passionate blue of the sky; gnarled cherry-trees, wrapped in vine-cloaks, bent glumly toward the fat, black soil; raspberry bushes struggled with agave plants; rank, graveyard-looking grass lay in matted tresses along the walks.

Then suddenly one turned, and there was the house, in full sunlight, high on its walled terrace, and the view of sky and lake bursting upon one in a silent explosion of blue and silver fire.

This was Dione's home. Here she had been born, and here she had lived for eighteen years, summer and winter, with Cecca, her mother's old nurse, as chief companion. Her father, who had died when she was fourteen, although he had loved her well, had been to her more an oracle than a companion. She had thought him mysterious, in the deeper, more awful sense of the word, and she had never sought to pierce this mysteriousness. This was intimately characteristic of Dione. From him she had her smattering of Greek and Latin, her average knowledge of the old Italian poets, her more than average knowledge of mythology. It was her father who had named her "Dione." To her mother, exasperated and outraged, who, as a meticulous Roman Catholic, had desired to name her in honor of Santa Cecilia, he had explained that Dione was the daughter of Æther and Ge — of Earth and Sky.

"As you know," said he, "I have no wish that my child should be a daughter of the Church. I was baptized into that Church without my consent. She will be baptized into it without her consent, according to the promise that I made you. But as she grows older she shall choose her faith or unfaith for herself. She shall be quite free. If she grows into a true child of earth and sky, that is all that I can wish for her. I am sorry to annoy you, but a pinch of truth in the beginning is better than a fistful in the end."

"I should be thankful that you did not choose to call her 'Ghe,'" retorted Madame Rupin, with explicable spite, "as in that case people would think that you had named her from a verb in the dialect. As it is, the poor little thing will have no festa, no name-day—"

"She can have her birthday, after the English custom. As for 'Dione,' you will admit that it is a pretty name, at least."

"It is pagan and heathen . . ."

"I am pagan and heathen . . ."

"*È vero! . . . È vero!*" cried his wife; and as his tall figure composedly passed through the door she "threw it after him" with both tiny hands, and said, in dialect, "May the devil eat you!" For Madame Rupin was not as refined in her language and emotions as in her appearance.

Her husband was a Servian, she an Italian, the daughter of a well-to-do Intrese wine-merchant,

and, on the distaff side, the descendant of an old family of the lesser gentry near Canobbio. She had been a beauty in her youth, and was still a very pretty woman of forty, blond, small, with charming pointed hands and feet, and the neatly finished, glistening, slightly malicious eyes of a Ouisteetee. It was strange how, from this fragile, delicately tinted body, there emanated a vibrant sensuality as pungent, as personal as the odor of some frail yet fleshly orchids. It was stifling or exhilarating according to the nature of the person that it affected. Her husband seemed to have withdrawn and closed in upon himself under its influence. He made the impression upon people of a cold, still man, whose decided opinions, felt to be adverse, were never uttered. "*Non è simpatico*" was the general verdict, followed usually by a shrug and "That poor, charming little woman!"

Upon Dione, from her babyhood, Madame Rupin seemed to have much the same effect that she had upon Rupin himself. Not that the child showed any aversion to her mother; but she seemed to regard her with a certain aloofness, as one apart from herself, standing quietly near her when called, and regarding her with serious, fixed eyes, as though asking, "Who are you? Are you really my mother?" This unconscious attitude of Dione's produced at last in her mother a sense of injured and irritated repulsion.

"She is all her father's! She is he, himself, over again!" she would cry. "I have no part in her. When she stares at me like that I feel as though she were putting the evil eye upon me!"

And when Cecca scolded her soundly for such a wicked judgment of her own flesh and blood, she would only shriek, nervously, "*Stregascia!* (Bad old witch!) I tell you there's not a shred of my flesh nor a drop of my blood in her! She'll grow up to do me an evil! . . . You will see."

But later, when the child began to develop a certain different beauty of her own, with her deep-set Slav eyes looking out from thick flamelets of crisp black hair, and her little fluted mouth, red as the fruit of cherry-laurels breaking the clear amber of her face, then it was "*Tesoro mio,*" and "*Stella,*" and "*Gioia.*" And frocks of lace were bought, and rosy sashes, and little shoes of bronze and gold. But this phase ended one day in disaster, when Cecca showed the outraged mother the lace frock torn to strips and the small shoes soggy with the water of the mountain pool, in which Dione had set them floating for boats.

"I do not like them," was all that she would say by way of explanation. "I like good linen, like Cecca's, that won't tear, and can be washed and dried on the grass. And I like to feel the earth under my toes. It likes to feel me, and I like to feel it."

Thus the child grew up in the centre of a triangle formed by her captious, capricious mother, her silent father, and her old, very wise, very foolish nurse.

She knew a little of a good many things, but of nothing very much save the mythology of Greece and Rome. Her father, among other things, had taught her to speak French. As for the varied bits of learning upon which he fed her, "Never be afraid of having a smattering of things," he had said to her one day. "To have even pinholes to look through is better than being shut behind a blank wall."

Dione never forgot this. She read or skimmed whatever came to her hand, but from first to last what most appealed to her was the idea of the bright, fierce, ruthless gods that had peopled earth and air for men of old.

CHAPTER II

IT was one of those violent blue-hot days that come in June to Lago Maggiore. It seemed as though the air would crackle with electricity did one sweep a hand through it, but no wind moved on the water. The *tramontana* had gasped itself away before midday, and the *inverna* was still dozing.

Behind the Sasso di Ferro huge cirrus clouds were creaming up. Dione, at full length on her back among the tangled grass and little, burning jewels of the wild flowers, could make out a vast form of Juno in her chariot, with a milk-white peacock trailing its silvered tail along the blue.

"If Juno melts first, I will go and talk with Cecca. If the peacock melts first, I will . . . What shall I do, Masciett?"

Masciett, her big white dog, a cross between the pure Esquimau sledge-dog and the short-haired Siberian "laika," the last gift of her father, heaved himself upon one haunch, and, fixing his kingly eyes of amber-hazel upon hers, let fall a majestic paw upon her breast. Then he drooped his head upon it and breathed forth a gentle sigh.

"*Sentimentale!*" said Dione, and tapped his nose. He looked wounded, sent a flash of tongue across the place that her fingers had stung, and withdrew his head.

Juno dissolved first, losing her tiara and one arm.

"*Ecco!* . . . So it's Cecca! Come, Masciett."

She sprang to her feet with one supple movement that would have brought her praise in a gymnasium, and went, with her long, free gait, toward the house, Masciett, like the white wolf of a fairy-tale, loping beside her.

As she passed through the crooked old hall toward Cecca's kingdom the voices of her mother and some guests came to her from the *salottino.*

"Eh, *cara mia,*" a woman was saying, "to hide her *moros* (lover) under an altar, and that altar built over a bath-tub! What do you say to that? . . . "

Dione's high little nose wrinkled up precisely as Masciett's did when he sniffed the loathed aroma of a cat.

"That is all they talk of or think of morning, noon, and night! . . . They make me *schivi* (sick), the whole lot of them! . . . B-r-r-r . . ."

And she scudded like a deer to be out of the sound of the unctuous and slanderous voices.

The house of Vareggio had been once called The House of the Weasel-man, because of its curious and winding under-passages and little chambers. Now it was usually spoken of as

The House of the Weasel. Through these chill, dark labyrinths Dione had to make her way, in order to reach Cecca's bedroom. A little shiver ran over her as the dank fungus-scented air struck her glowing young body, and she ran faster than ever up the queer little stone staircase that brought her to her nurse's door. There she stopped short, arrested by a shaft of sunlight that, darting through a window overhead, struck across some freshly painted words above the lintel.

"*Ito, alo Massa Dandi Bandi III. I.R.N.R.I.*," read the young girl under her breath. "What new witchcraft is Cecca after now?"

She set the blackened old door wide with one fling of her arm.

"*Salute, strega bianca*" (Hail, white witch), said she.

Cecca was an imposing and beautiful old woman. She looked up calmly with broad hazel eyes, and replied:

"It is not a good thing to call any 'witch,' whether white, black, or gray."

With that she "made horns," the sign against evil, with both hands, and then resumed composedly her task of sorting the dried herbs which lay in little bundles on the narrow oak table before her.

"Pardon," said Dione. "I thought a 'white witch' meant a good person."

"No witch is good. Some persons have power against evil, but that is not to be a witch. When things are bolic I throw good against them. I have that power. But that is not to be a witch."

Dione came and sat beside the table. She put an elbow between two bundles of herbs, and took her chin upon her palm.

"Do not be offended," said she. "I did not know. I will never say so again. When you say 'bolic' I suppose you mean 'diabolic'?"

"I mean exactly what I say," replied Cecca, firmly. "No more, no less."

"I see," said Dione. "Those herbs smell very good."

"Some are good and some are evil. You can no more judge herbs by their smell than men by their words."

"I see," said Dione again.

"The evil herbs," volunteered Cecca after a pause, "are to fight evil with—as when one says 'Fight the devil with fire.' The good herbs are also to be used against evil, but then, also, they can be used for good alone."

"It is very interesting, truly," said Dione. "Tell me some more about them. What is that one for that you have in your hand?"

"Eh, Gioia, this is a very remarkable herb, and a truly beneficent one. It is called 'Concordia.' I can tell you a strange and true story about this herb."

A light came into her vivid eyes, and a smile, tranquil and pleasant to see, stirred her lips.

"Tell it, Cecca mine. You know how it pleases me to hear your stories."

"*Tesoro mio*," said Cecca, standing erect, and spreading the fingers of her right hand toward Dione in a fine gesture, "this is a true tale."

"I listen," said Dione.

Then Cecca, with another of her noble gestures, took a sprig of the herb between her thumb and forefinger, and, holding it up, addressed to it her story, as to the mysterious protagonist.

"This little leaflet, stem, and flower that you see here in my hand, seemingly so weak a thing, this little twig that some would call a weed and tread under foot, is stronger than you or I, *Gioia mia*—yes, stronger than a whole village full—than a whole town full as big as Milano—than an army—than all the people of the whole world. It is a power for good, and more than that an angel is not. Yes, *Tesoro*, look well at it. This little herb has a power that priests have not."

"Tell me what power it has, dear Cecca."

"'Concordia' is its name, and concord it has power to bring between man and wife. Listen. I will tell you a true tale. You know Luisin and Tilde, who live in the third house from the well in Vareggio. Eh! You will remember how they were always quarrelling. It was sticks for break-

fast and sticks for supper. Blind as moles they were to the good in each other. They had slices of *salami* on the eyes of their hearts as big as this big palm of mine. So Tilde comes to me crying one night. Her back is all blue and green where he banged her with the tongs. Says she: 'Oh, Cecca! You have the good power, they say. Give me a spell, for my man will surely kill me some day if there is no help. Priests are no good, the Madonna pardon me,' says she. Then, Gioia, what do I say to her? 'Take this little herb,' say I. 'Little it is, but it is stronger than your man, even when he has the tongs,' say I. 'Take this little herb'—it was not so big a piece as this bit I hold here in my hand, *cara mia*—'take this,' say I, giving it to her, 'and boil it in your *minestron*, and see that of that soup you eat together.' Thus I tell her. . . ."

She stopped short, brought the sprig of Concordia close to her eyes, regarded it earnestly, then held it off again, and pointed to it with the forefinger of her other hand.

"Well?" said Dione.

"My treasure," said Cecca, "that was eight months ago, and they have never quarrelled since."

"Miraculous!" said Dione.

"Yes, it is miraculous," assented Cecca. "Will you keep this sprig for good-fortune?"

"A thousand thanks! I shall love to have it."

She slipped it in the folds of her soft, green linen blouse, and then, chin on both hands, sat listening gravely to further stories of the herbs and their "powers." At last Cecca said, suddenly:

"And *la mamma?* Were the *sciori* (gentlefolk) still in the house as you came through?"

"Yes. Cecca, how can my mother amuse herself with such tattling, gossiping, geese of people?"

"*È una bambina*" (She's a baby), said Cecca, indulgently.

"*È una bambola*" (She's a doll), replied Dione, not with scorn or with intention of disrespect, but merely as one stating a fact.

"My dear," said Cecca, sternly, "that is not a good way to speak, as I have said before. After all, she is your mother. 'Honor thy father and thy mother.'"

"I have always thought that a foolish saying," replied Dione, unmoved. "Either one's parents are honorable and one honors them, or they are not, and one does not. I honored my father. I could as soon honor a little yellow hen as my mother. It is all very well to say 'God says you must do this and that.' If it were to strike or not to strike one might obey; but when it is one's feelings that are ordered about, why, they simply cannot be ordered about. There, that is truth."

"It sometimes seems to me," said Cecca, still stern, "that one can love the truth too much. One can make it into a sort of idol and worship it. There are truths and truths. Some can be brought into the light of day and do men good, and others ought to be put into coffins and laid in the dark."

"If one did, their ghosts would walk."

Cecca "made horns" again, and then sweeping forward and downward a forefinger, that indicated Dione's figure from head to feet:

"*Tousetta*," said she, "you are so young that you think wisdom twinned at your birth, but, listen well, some day one of these truths that you are so fond of will eat you whole."

"One might die a worse death than to be eaten by truth," said Dione.

"Eh, but perhaps one doesn't die. Perhaps one just stays alive in its maw and suffers."

"Cecca *mia*, nothing in the world can keep me from seeking the truth, and speaking the truth, and seeing the truth. That was one thing that my father taught me among others, and I also think that I was born with it already in me."

"You were born very obstinate, as God knows and the poor *balia* who tried to wean you. What that poor woman suffered! . . . wormwood would not do. I had to put powder of quinine on her breast before you would give up."

Dione looked at her thoughtfully.

"I have always been so glad that my mother did not nurse me," she then said. "And that is another truth for you."

Cecca returned her gaze severely.

"You are in a little devil's mood to-day, and that is a truth for you," said she. "And I have some more truths to tell you about truth which it will be very good for you to listen to. Too much truth, my dear, is like too much wine. First it goes to one's head and then to one's entrails, and then it turns into poison and poisons one. Yes, my dear, the Lord God is the only One who can afford to see and hear and speak the whole truth, for He is almighty, and if truth gets too strong He can set His foot upon it. Not even the devil himself (she 'made horns' again) can afford to tell all the truth, because if he did he would have to say that it distressed him to be in hell, and then all the devilkins and witches would turn upon him and tear him to pieces for a turncoat. *Ecco! There* are some truths that I'll wager you did not know before."

Dione almost never laughed and rarely smiled, or she would have done both at that moment. She only looked affectionately at her old nurse as she ended her philosophical tirade, and said "*Ciao!*"—that elastic dialect word which is something like the German *bitte* in its comprehensiveness. It may signify "Good-bye," or "How d'ye do?" or "There's an end of it," or "I can't

help it," or "The Lord's will be done," or "Take it or leave it"—and a dozen more things beside.

"Eh, *ciao!*" said Dione. "Now that you have said what was on your mind, you will be nice to me. And I am glad, for there is a thing that I want you to tell me very much. Why have you written those strange words over your door, Cecca *mia?*"

CHAPTER III

CECCA paused in her work, and a strange, inward look came over her face. Then she crossed herself rapidly, made the usual sign against evil, and, resting both hands, palm down, upon the table, gazed at Dione.

"Eh, Gioia," said she, "that is altogether a different tale from the tale of the Concordia. . . . It has to do with a *stregascia*. . . ." She paused again. "Perhaps you laugh, eh?"

"No. . . . I find very few things to laugh at. It seems to me that with most people laughing is like sneezing—a sort of spasm without reason. I have no cause to laugh at you, Cecca. You know that I believe in many things myself at which other folk would laugh."

"Eh, truly," said Cecca, "the way that my milk and honey take legs to themselves and walk off, so to speak, would vex many a housewife. It seems strange that those *sciori* of yours that one can't see should be so fond of milk and honey."

"It is an old custom, and it pleases me to offer the wood-gods milk and honey for fair weather

right in the face of the Church. *Evoë!* Wood-gods, I say, I bring you fair milk and honey and little wheaten-cakes: grant that the *mareng* (the sirocco) be blown flat to-day by the *maggior*. And all the while the bells of Ceredo and San Maurizio are ringing, and no one there knows that the old, forgotten gods are being invoked. I find that very pleasant."

"And do they answer?"

"When they see fit," said Dione, gravely. "Sometimes before I have set my feet upon the ground, after climbing to lay the little leaf-basket in the notch of a tree where none will see it, yes. . . . I have known the *maggior* to rise even while I was in the tree."

"*Madonna mia!*" breathed Cecca, awed. "The saints grant that there be no evil in it."

Dione smiled now, her slow, rare smile, and her strange face became beautiful.

"There is no evil in it, *cara*," said she. "How could there be evil in asking for fair weather? Do not your priests do it?"

"Surely; but then they ask it of God, and that is very different."

"No," said Dione. "They do not ask it of God. They ask it of Saint this, or Santa that, or the Madonna, or one of the *bambini*. . . ."

"Still," said Cecca, unconvinced, "it seems to me a very dangerous custom."

"I am not afraid," said Dione.

"Not Afraid was eaten by an accident, my dear."

"And accident is the only devil, though you believe in one with horns and tail."

"*Signor!*" cried Cecca, and "made horns" herself, with both hands, three times in rapid succession.

"And now," said Dione, "tell me the tale of the *stregascia.*"

"*Ciao,*" said Cecca, "but we will not name her, my dear, though you know very well who she is and see her often. It is not well to say the name of a *jettatrice* (one with the evil eye), even if one makes the horns when one says it. *Ciao* . . . I will tell you. This woman is very evil, my child. She is truly bolic. If one angers her she throws it after one . . . and she has great power. *Ebbene!* . . . I angered her—and many things not at all good happened to me. We will not speak of them now. But three nights ago . . . if you laugh at this I shall be very angry indeed . . ."

"I have not the least desire to laugh," said Dione.

"*Ciao* . . . laugh or not, this is what took place. I was lying quietly on my bed when I hear a soft yet evil noise—*frrt* . . . *frrt!* . . . I cannot tell you why I knew that it was evil, but I did know it. . . . It is as when one falls in the water and gets wet. One does not know by

reason that one is wet, one only knows well that one is wet. And when one knows things that way, my dear, they are true."

"I understand," said Dione.

"Well, Gioia, this evil thing I took at first to be a bat flitting about my room. . . . And just as I was about to rise and get a cloth to strike at it . . . a little, greenish paring of moon slides across my window . . . and—*I see that stregascia, seated on a broom of twigs, going about and about my room like a great bat of the Inferno* . . ."

Cecca stopped, and, wiping the perspiration from her brow with the back of one hand, flung aside the drops with a snapping gesture.

"*Dio mio*," said she, "I am bathed in cold sweat just remembering it."

"It must have been terrible," assented Dione, with sympathy. "What did you do?"

"I knew the right words to say, the Madonna be praised, and I said them."

"Then? . . . "

"Then away with her out of the window, and I hear the vines crackling and the little birds cheeping with terror where she crashed through."

"So that is why—"

"Listen. Your grandfather, my dear, your mother's father, was a wise old man. He had many learned books on the subject of witches and evil spirits of all sorts. Some of these I have.

And from one of them I got those words that are written above my door. And since you like truth so much, this tale should please you, for it is true, every word."

"Thank you," said Dione. "It may be that witches exist for those who believe in them. I sometimes think that by believing in things we make them exist."

Cecca pondered this for a moment.

"That is a strange belief," said she at last.

"Well, you know that you tell me I am strange."

"You were born with a caul, my dear. People who are born with cauls are both strange and see strange sights. I have that caul, my dear. It is a thing of great power."

Dione sat gazing before her so intently that all at once Cecca and the table and the little bundles of herbs grew very small and receded in a bright haze. Then she closed her eyes and opened them very wide, as though coming out of a sleep.

"Cecca," said she, "did you want your children before they came?"

"*Santa Maria!* What questions you ask!" exclaimed her nurse. "Did I want them? Should a cow and a goat and a cat want their little ones, and a woman not want hers? Surely I wanted them."

"Were you afraid?"

"Afraid? . . . *Mamma mia!* . . . No one wants

pain. But I was a *brava tousa* (a fine girl). I had good health, and also I knew that a woman who dies in childbirth goes straight to paradise."

"Did it hurt much?"

"*L'è matta!*" (She's crazy!) cried Cecca. "'Did it hurt? . . . Did it hurt?' . . . Of course it hurt. What would you? It's a fierce pain and a fierce joy."

"I understand," said Dione, thoughtfully. "I should like to have a child, and I should want pain. I should not like to have a child as one buys a doll from a shop, with no trouble at all. Yes . . . I should like to have a son . . . a big, strong boy, who would grow to be a fine man and take the world and play with it like a ball . . . and do fine things with it."

"The Virgin hear her!" cried Cecca. "Never was there such a girl-child born into the world! Why, even peasant girls would be shy of saying such a thing plump out!"

"I do not see why," replied Dione. "I have said nothing shameful. Of course, I should want my son to be born honourably. I should want him to inherit a good name and add honour to it. I should want to love his father and be loved by him. I am no thing of straw. I am a woman, and I should want to love my man with all the life that is in me."

Cecca gazed at her with great, considering eyes, grown suddenly soft.

"The Madonna send you a good husband, *Gioia mia*," she said, finally, in a loving voice.

Dione laid her firm, beautifully chiselled hand in her old nurse's outstretched palm with a strong grasp.

"I shall ask one of the great old-time gods to do that," she said. "I have thought of it before."

CHAPTER IV

"*EH! la Peppa!*" cried Cecca, suddenly, starting to her feet. "There is the mamma calling. . . . By the sound of her voice she has been calling a long time. . . . *Vengo! Vengo!* . . . Am I tidy, Gioia? She may want me to carry wine and cake to the *sciori*."

"Let me smooth your headkerchief a bit. There . . . now you are as tidy as a wren."

Dione adjusted the gold pins in the white headkerchief with its printed border of nasturtiums, pulled out the ends, and, taking Cecca's face in her two hands, kissed her between the eyes.

"*Vengo! Vengo!*" (I come! I come!) called Cecca again, rushing toward the door. "Eh, but she'll be in a fine rage with me!"

"Never mind," said Dione, consolingly. "It's only like the popping of a rose-leaf on the back of one's hand. It doesn't hurt."

As she was speaking, and Cecca reached the door, it flew open, and Madame Rupin stood quivering like a little snake on the threshold. She darted forked words at her laggard servant.

"Snail! Deaf one!" said she. "It is a disgrace!

. . . an infamy! . . . Am I to shriek my throat sore and run my feet off, and you here idling the day away, and company in the parlor? . . . Ah! And so there *you* are," stabbing a little white finger with a black nail toward Dione. "There *you* are in a dress like a peasant's, and Signora Varoni and her son here for the first time, and asking for you. *Dio mio! Dio mio!* As if I hadn't enough troubles to turn my eyebrows gray without you two heaping them on me. And the *Varoning* (the young Varoni) so elegant and *homme du monde* in his English clothes. . . . Yes, he is a real *scior* (gentleman). . . . He sends his shirts to England to be laundered! . . . And the Madonna only knows how much money they have. . . . And you in that cotton shift! And . . ."

"It's not a shift, mamma," said Dione; "it's a very nice blouse and skirt. But I can change it if you wish, though I don't think a boy who sends his shirts to England to be washed is worth taking much trouble for, since he must necessarily be a fool."

"Oh, *Madonna!* Oh, *Santa Anna!* Give me patience!" cried the exasperated mother. "Was there ever such a girl? . . . Here I am, boiling my brains to syrup night and day to find her a husband, and she calls a man who has money enough to send his shirts to England to be washed, a fool! Oh, I shall smother! . . . I shall burst!"

And she actually ripped open three buttons of her bodice.

"*Lassala bui!*" (Let it boil!) Cecca had growled at first, with one of her favorite expressions; but when she saw the spoiled child actually on the way to tearing her silk gown she became the soothing nurse again in an instant.

"*Na, na, cara,*" said she, wheedlingly. "Don't hurt your pretty fingers like that and spoil your pretty frock. Go back to the *sciori* and talk nicely, and before you can wink I will be there with the Marsala and almond-cakes, and the little daughter will have on her white linen and Venetian sash, and then—who knows? . . . There may be a wedding before long. Patience!—patience!—take your little mirror and put a dust of powder on your little nose, for it always shines, you know, when you get so angry."

Madame Rupin let herself be coaxed and powdered, and the drops of wrath whisked from the corners of her eyes. Then when she was re-adjusted and calm, and Cecca had hurried off, she turned to her tall and silent daughter, who reminded her so irritatingly of her tall and silent husband.

"Be sure," said she, "to pinch your cheeks before you enter. It's absurd to have such a red mouth in such a pale face. And puff out your hair more in the fashion. You will find two side-

combs on my dressing-table. Yes, and put on your Venetian beads with the sash. It is certainly a trial to a mother to have her daughter look such a *forestiera* (foreigner), but at least you can *dress* like an Italian girl when I have guests. Yes, *that* you can do at least. . . . So be quick, and carry out my instructions exactly."

With this she disappeared, and Dione, looking after her, put her two arms above her head and twisted her lithe body in a stretch of supreme boredom, yawning deeply as she did so.

"I wonder," said she, aloud, with arms still high above her head, "who sorts out the mothers and daughters? I cannot say that it seems to me they have much talent for their task."

Then she let both arms drop about Masciett, who had reared himself against her with both paws on her chest.

"*You* are *real*, Mascietton," she said; "that is why I like you."

And she squeezed him hard, and kissed him between the eyes as she had kissed Cecca.

When the girl entered the *salottino* with her lustrous wreath of black flamelets held out by the side-combs which she had obediently used, and her long, tapering limbs clothed in the pearly texture of her gown, though her only ornaments

were the necklet of gold Venetian beads and the saffron sash, the room seemed suddenly to grow smaller and the people in it to dwindle.

"*È molto distinta . . .*" murmured *la* Varoni, aside, to her mother, and Madame Rupin understood perfectly that this was said because the lady could use neither of the terms "beautiful" or "*simpatica*" with a clear conscience. Her small nose began to shine, but she was comforted at once by the evident impression that Dione was making upon the son.

After Dione had done her stately duty, and passed Marsala and almond-cakes to every one, her mother took a sweet revenge on the Varoni by saying, in a voice of honey:

"And now, *Tesoro mio*, you can show our old garden to Signor Varoni, who has been admiring it so much from the window."

La Varoni fanned herself a little quickly, but the young man jumped to his feet with evident delight. As he stood beside Dione his head just topped her shoulder, and yet he was not so very small. He was trim and dapper, and had nice black eyes and little mustaches, and his clothes were of the exaggeratedly smart type that English tailors make for continentals.

"I shall be most charmed if the Signorina will be so gracious," said he, and he made the neatest of bows *à la Milanese.*

"But certainly. I will show it to you with

pleasure," replied Dione, thinking that he worked as perfectly as a toy.

"Then may I open the door for you?" said he, and held it while she and Masciett passed through.

"These plants, growing in beds about the palm-trees," said Dione, beginning her task conscientiously, "are herbs of various sorts. This is a rather curious one; it is called *erba capone*. Will you smell a piece?"

She held out a sprig, and the young man bent gallantly above her outstretched hand and sniffed at it.

"*Per bacco!*" cried he, with an enlightened expression. "It smells exactly like roast chicken. That is very strange."

"Some people put it in salad," continued Dione, "but I dislike it myself. I think it unpleasant for a plant to smell like flesh."

"*E vero*," said the young man, looking still more enlightened. "That is what I think also."

"This shrub," continued Dione, "is a purple magnolia. I forget the botanical name for it, though my father taught it me, but it is not important."

"Not in the least!" exclaimed Varoni, enthusiastically. Somehow it made her seem more human and a little nearer, to know that she had forgotten the Latin name. Her lashes were so thick and so dark that he could not make out the exact color of her eyes.

"It is strange," he reflected, "that her eyes are not large, and yet are very remarkable. They give one a sensation."

Though why Dione's eyes should have given young Varoni "a sensation" it is not easy to say, for nothing could be more expressionless than they when they happened to rest upon him.

"Will you have one of these magnolia flowers?" she now asked, politely. "They are rare. Perhaps your Signora Mamma would be pleased with it."

"Gladly! . . . A thousand thanks!" he exclaimed, and he took the large, unsentimental flower from her finger-tips as though it had been a violet and she had drawn it from her breast.

"This column," she went on, pausing beside it a moment, "is very ancient. It was put here by the Romans. Many people have wanted to buy it, but my father would not sell it."

"He was right, truly!" cried Varoni. "It is most interesting. Not beautiful, but interesting. Interesting things appeal to me more even than beautiful things. How is it with you, if I may ask, Signorina?"

"I like both," said Dione. "And when they are both at the same time, I like that best."

"Precisely! Exactly! . . . What a true remark. I think that you are something of a philosopher, Signorina."

Dione gazed at him for a moment, and he de-

cided that her eyes were a smoky gray. Then she said: "I was trying to see what there was philosophical in my words, but I could not see that there was anything."

"Modesty," returned Varoni, "is one of the most gracious of all the virtues."

Dione looked at him again, but it was the merest glance this time. She did not say anything more, and Varoni cast about in his mind for suitable subjects of conversation with a young girl, since, according to her mother's regretful account before her appearance, she cared neither for balls nor any of the gayeties usually so dear to the hearts of most young women. Her long, lissome walk was "going to his head," as he afterward told a friend. With him it was th "*coup de foudre*" from the first. That gait of hers, so unlike the hippy, flurried walk of most Italian women, had been the "*coup de grace*."

"It is so with us Italians," he had told his English friend afterward. "We find a woman *simpatica*, pretty, then all at once—paf!—we are in love with her, and all because she moves her lips in a certain way, or has a special gesture with her hair, or—yes, once I had a friend who fell in love with an American girl because she whistled prettily from the throat!"

Dione, quite unconscious of the emotions that she was stirring, walked along in silence because she had nothing more to say just then.

"How wonderful that old stone column!" burst forth Varoni suddenly, in despair of a better subject. "To think of its having been there in the time of the Romans!"

Dione stopped to loosen her thin skirt from the clutch of an agave plant.

"As for that," said she, "when one comes to think of it, one stone is not more ancient than another. There is a big one in the field there which has a queer story."

"May I hear it?" asked Varoni, a little dashed.

"Surely. One can read what is cut on it for one's self."

"I beg you to tell it to me, Signorina."

"Very well. It lies on the land of a very avaricious old man, and before it was dug up and turned as it now is, there were curious characters and numbers cut on its face. The old man became convinced that treasure was hidden under it, and so he sent for some learned people that he knew, and they made out that the inscription meant that it would be a good thing to move that stone from its bed. It was a very, very big stone, you must know."

"Well?" said Varoni. "I beg you to go on. I am deeply interested."

"So was the old man. He got many workmen and gave them much money, and at last, behold! there was the stone turned over on its side upon the grass."

"*Ebbene? Ebbene?*"

"They found no treasure, but they found more writing on the other side."

"And that—?"

"That said, '*You did well to turn me. My side ached.*' I do not often laugh, but I laughed when I heard that story, which is true," said Dione; then at sight of the young man's face she laughed again, and after a second he joined in.

It was a pity, he thought, as they went on, that with such a laugh as that she should not indulge oftener in mirth. And Dione's laughter was really like what one might imagine the fluting of Pan's pipes to be, as he tries them softly.

CHAPTER V

THEY had now reached the limit of the garden to the west, and Dione sat sidewise on the low stone wall, and suddenly unclasping the beads from about her throat, dropped them into her lap.

"I do not like things round my neck. They annoy me," she said, in answer to Varoni's unconscious look of surprise; then, still mindful of her rôle of cicerone: "I believe that this is one of the finest views of Lago Maggiore. You say that you have never been here before. Well, that is Monte Rosa to the northwest, and to the south is Angera, and those are the Borromean Islands, and that mountain opposite is called the Sasso di Ferro. And that is Baveno, where you see the white scar of the quarries, and Pallanza is there below us."

"Magnificent!" said Varoni. "It is like a beautiful postal card."

Dione gloomed at him for a second, then she said to herself, "Of what use being angry with a fool?" and merely observed:

"No. I do not think that it is like a postal card."

"But there are very beautiful postal cards, Signorina," persisted he, eagerly, feeling somehow that she was not pleased. "Perhaps you have never seen the kind I mean. They are painted by hand, by various artists. I have a friend in Milan who has a remarkable collection."

"Still," said Dione, "I do not think that it can be like a postal card."

Her tone was final, and the young man was silent, wishing that the unfortunate simile had not occurred to him.

"What an immensity of water," he ventured, presently, feeling that this could not be offensive.

"Yes," said Dione, "it is a large lake. I believe it is called 'Maggiore' for that reason."

And she did not mean to be disagreeable.

It was near the sunset hour, and air and water sheened with the delicate tinting of a rainbow's double.

Into this gentle loveliness the Sasso di Ferro (the Stone of Iron—Pan's Mountain, as Dione called it to herself) shouldered up, like a grim fact into a dream. From Laveno came the liquid note of bells, melting, mingling, fainting out along the silver line of the *inverna*, that had risen late and would soon be fast asleep again. Then would flow the little *intragnola*, the mountain breeze, all scented with the dew of woodland mold and new-cut grass and wild flowers.

"Like a postal card!" thought Dione. "He

should go to England with his laundry and learn something. But, then, I must be polite to him, even if he is a goose."

"I believe that you Milanese usually go to Varese in the summer, do you not?" she asked, in order to say something.

"Yes. Varese is very *chic*," said Varoni—"very gay. But this summer a friend of ours—an Englishman who has been visiting us in Milan—told my mother that she should really visit Lago Maggiore—that it was, so to speak, a duty. So we came."

"You are very obedient to that Englishman, are you not?" said Dione, and she smiled for the second time that day. Varoni at that moment forgave her all her snubbing.

"He is one to be obeyed, truly," said he, smiling in return. "He has that way with him. He has many ways with him. But, then, you will probably see for yourself, Signorina. The mamma was talking with Signora Rupin about lodgings for him. He wishes to come to a little mountain village not too far from the lake. And your Signora Mamma said that Ceredo there" (he pointed upward) "would be just the place for him. He is a poet . . . a very great young poet, I assure you. And he has not long hair, but looks like an athlete, and does not 'pose' at all, but is very merry and good company and *simpatico*. At present he is reading in the

Ambrosiana, for he wishes to write a great drama about Leonardo. And there is a wonderful book of Leonardo's in that library—so he tells me. Then, you see, when he has read all that he wishes he will come here and write."

He paused for breath, and Dione, fixing on him her grave eyes, now full of expression, said, "What is his name?"

"His name is Alaric Kent." Varoni pronounced it "Alareec."

"It is a very pretty name," said Dione.

"Yes. 'Alaric' one might call pretty. But 'Kent'—do you not think it a little abrupt?" ventured he, somewhat timidly.

"It comes like a full-stop—like a sort of italics. I like it," said Dione.

"Well, that is very pleasant. I hope that you will like him, too."

"I do not like many people," said Dione. "It is a fault."

"But not at all—truly!" exclaimed Varoni. "It is much more valuable when one is liked by some one who does not like many."

"That is true," said Dione.

She was so little aware of him that she did not observe the sentimental look in his kindly black eyes. He was not discouraged. In his code of ethics it was quite fitting and eminently proper that young girls should be difficult and unresponsive. And, after all, she liked something that he

had said to her. She liked his friend's name. This encouraged him to pursue the subject.

"My friend Kent won cups for rowing at Oxford as well as for mental qualities," he continued. "He is what they call an 'all-round man' in England—that is to say, a man of many qualities. And he is as good a swordsman as any Italian. That is very rare."

"Yes," said Dione, "a man should be a man, even if he is a poet."

This seemed a rather decided sentiment for a young girl, but somehow Varoni liked it.

"I am a good swordsman myself," said he, with the *naïveté* of a child.

"As good as he?" asked Dione.

Varoni flushed.

"To tell the truth, I am not," said he, and Dione liked him for the first time, despite his being a "goose."

"I dare say," she said, gently, "from what you tell me, that others may do things very excellently indeed, only that your friend does them better."

"Precisely," said Varoni, giving her a grateful look. "He is truly a most unusual being."

"What sort of things does he write?"

"Poems—poems full of life and joy. They are mad about him in England. They say that the old Greek fire burns in him, and that he is modern—most modern also. And our own poets think

well of him, too. They all say that he is very gifted."

"And is he very young?"

"He is twenty-seven years old, but he looks younger."

"And is he ugly?"

"No! 'Ugly'? Why ugly? He is a splendid man. Very fair. He looks Greek, as so many English do."

"I only thought," said Dione, "that he must have some failing."

"Truly, I think not," said little Varoni, and then all at once it occurred to him that these ardent eulogies of his remarkable friend were not the best means to further his own cause. He felt crestfallen and looked it, for his was a limpid nature.

Quickly Dione read what was passing in his little mind as though his brow had been transparent, though she was quite unaware of the extent to which she had engaged his interest. Being of a kindly nature herself, she now said, though there was much more that she would have liked to hear about the marvellous Englishman:

"After all, perfect people are not very amusing to talk about. Where there are no shadows there is no interest. Fancy the world without shadows."

"What an original thought!" said Varoni.

Despite her will, Dione's black brows drew together. Then she said, amiably:

"Do the people in Varese ever sail or row on the lake?"

Somewhat bewildered by the sudden change of subject, Varoni replied, dubiously:

"I do not think that they ever go to the Lake of Varese at all."

"It is strange," said Dione, "how few Italians care for the water. Look at our lake there"—she swept both hands toward it. "One little *monotipo* came out for the *tramontana* this morning—only one. And now that the *intragnola* is rising, and it is the loveliest hour of all, there is not a sail in sight except the great square sail of that old *barca* that is carrying bricks to Ghiffa, with its clumsy rudder made of a bent tree—just as in the time of the Romans, and perhaps even before."

This was a long speech for Dione, and Varoni listened deferentially, thinking how well she talked, but afraid to say so lest her very sensitive modesty, as he considered it, should take alarm.

"I had never thought of it, but it is perfectly true," he observed, when she had finished; then added: "Do you read much, if I may ask, Signorina?"

"I read—yes. Not so very much. I like mythology."

"That is a very original taste," said Varoni, politely, "but I meant novels, romances."

Then, suddenly remembering the usual trend of French and Italian novels, he supplemented, hastily: "*I Promessi Sposi* is considered a great novel by all nations."

"Yes. But it is too far off. I like to hear of things that happen about one."

"Yet, Signorina—mythology?" he ventured.

"That is different. It does not seem far off to me."

"That is curious," said the young man, lamely.

"I cannot explain," said Dione.

There was silence for a few moments. Then Varoni ventured again.

"*Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre* is a very pretty romance. Have you read that?"

"I began it," said Dione.

He did not ask whether she had finished it, as her tone was expressive. The necessity for speech, however, impelled him to go on with his list.

"*Picciola* is a charming book, I think. You liked that, did you not?"

"I read it so long ago," said Dione, wearily. She slipped down from the wall as the first perfumed puff of the *intragnola* struck her cheek.

"We must return," she explained. "Signora Varoni will think that we have got lost."

"But there must be some romance that pleased

you, Signorina," persisted he, as they began to walk again toward the house. "That pretty tale of *Graziella?*"

"I never read it," said Dione. "I do not think that I care much for novels. *Il Fuoco* interested me at first. But then I did not like it. It seemed to me to have the odor of a sick-room where there is fever. I—"

"You have read *Il Fuoco*, Signorina?" gasped Varoni. "But surely . . . but surely . . ."

"I am afraid that I should shock you very much if you knew me better, Signor Varoni. But you must not blame my mamma. It was my father who educated me."

"Pardon me. I have made you angry. I feel it a great misfortune."

"You have not made me angry, but I am tired, and when I am tired I am apt to say what I feel too bluntly. I do not think that I was meant for society. That is all."

"But, Signorina! . . . But allow me . . ."

"Do not let us say any more about it, if you please," said Dione, now thoroughly worn out. "I know very well that Italian girls are not supposed to have any ears or eyes or brains until after they are married. It is great nonsense. But what will you? It is a custom. And customs are what most people live by. Do you wonder that most people are silly? Here is the house. And here is another magnolia flower for

the Signora Mamma. I hope that I have not offended you in my turn."

"Signorina!" was all that the poor *Varoning* could say before his mother and Dione's came to meet them.

CHAPTER VI

IT was nine o'clock at night. Madame Rupin had gone to an *Illuminazione* in Intra, and Dione and Cecca were walking down the mountain-side toward Ghiffa, a basket between them, in which were three magnolia leaves folded neatly into a little cup and filled with cream and honey, a small *fiasco* of red wine, and over all a fair linen cloth.

Above them the gauzy sky drooped low as though heavy with its embroidery of stars; the planets deeply gold and still, the lesser lights of flower-lilac, and frost-blue, and firefly-green, darting spikelets, seeming to shut and open like strange blossoms of the air; the fields of sky palpitated with them as a field of earth when the bees are questing.

"I used to think," said Dione, looking up at them, "when I was very little that the stars were holes in the heaven, and that the gods and goddesses, running on their pleasure, shut out the light and let it shine through again with their twinkling feet."

"Perhaps the angels really do so," said Cecca.

"But the stars are not holes—they are worlds."

"So I have heard tell," said Cecca, in a tone that evinced how little she believed in hearsay.

They now passed into a thick wood of oak and chestnut, and Masciett began scouting in great loops and circles among the underbrush.

"See him!" said Dione. "He looks like a ghost-wolf in this light."

"*Psst!*" whispered Cecca, crossing herself. "Do not say such things. Have you never heard of the werewolf? An Austrian girl told me of it when I was young. It is an evil spirit that takes the form of a wolf. On such an errand as we are going I do not like to hear such things."

"I am not afraid," said Dione.

"Yes, that is what you always say. Once you are made afraid, you will not say it so often."

"I do not think that I shall ever be afraid," replied Dione.

"Well, the saints grant it."

The wood grew darker, then thinned. Through the dim light, just across their path, a dark thing leaped.

"What a big hare!" cried Dione.

Cecca was crossing herself, and muttering mingled prayers and invocations.

"It is an evil omen. I fear the saints are against this errand of yours."

"There is no evil in my errand," said Dione.

"Ay, but you are praying to strange powers."

"I do not pray—I only ask."

"It is the same," said Cecca.

"Perhaps," said Dione.

"It is precisely the same. Now, give me all the basket to carry. It is ridiculous that my young *sciora* should help carry a basket."

"No. I like to help carry it."

"You are obstinate, as I've said."

"And what are you?"

"Very well," said Cecca; "we will not pull a good basket in two just because you have a pig-headed mood on."

Directly above them a little mountain-owl uttered its tremulous, wild cry.

"*Signor!*" breathed Cecca, again crossing herself. "This night is full of omens. It does not please me at all."

"Why, it is only a little fluffy owl," said Dione, unconscious that she was quoting Shelley.

"Ay, and the seed of evil in the heart of man is little, but it is also mighty."

"That owl would cry whether we were passing or not."

"Yet it is strange that it should cry just as we pass."

"I cannot see that it is," said Dione.

"Then you have slices of *salami* on the eyes of your heart," returned Cecca, with one of her favorite expressions.

"And you," said Dione, "look for the hair in a new-laid egg."

Cecca hunched her shoulders, and they passed out of the wood into a vineyard. Cecca made Dione keep to the path while she walked beside her on the flowery grass. Its crushed wetness came up to them in sweet whiffs.

"How I love being abroad at night!" said Dione. "The air is so much purer when others are not breathing it in and out. And then all things seem to have a secret to tell. 'Hush!' the little winds seem saying. 'Hush—listen—there is a great secret—keep very still—and we will tell it to you.'"

"And when you keep very still, are you told this secret?"

"No. It is too great to tell, after all. But they would like to tell it, and I would like to hear, and that is much."

"That is just nonsense, it seems to me," said Cecca, who was getting irritable under the stress of mystery that she felt pressing in upon her.

"Yes. It would naturally seem so to others. I do not know why I mentioned it."

"Well, at least here we are at the ravine," retorted Cecca, "and that is half-way down. The Madonna be praised!"

They sat for a few moments on a slab of rock at its edge, and looked down into the great wooded cleft. Below them the dark tops of the

chestnut-trees clung like heavy clouds to its sides, and the deep drumming of water came up to them. From lip to lip it was filled with a white vapor.

"It looks like a big iron pot full of whipped cream," said Cecca.

"It looks more like a witch's cauldron full of steam," said Dione.

"*Santa Maria!*" exclaimed Cecca, really angry and getting to her feet, "if you were a *bimba* I would give you a pair of slaps that would set your ears ringing! . . . You say those things just because you know I dislike them, and it shows that you have a bad disposition. I should have been more severe with you when you were little, and then you would have respected me more at present."

"Dear Cecca," said Dione, clasping her unwilling neck with a white arm as strong as a boy's, and forcing the brown cheek against her own, "do not be angry. I spoke thoughtlessly—not in order to vex you, truly."

"*Viva Dio!*" said Cecca, at once mollified. "All is well, then. But unhook this sweet little arm of yours, for you are choking me."

"It is because I love you—I do not love any one else, I believe."

"And so do I love you. But it is better to live for love than to be choked for love, *Tesoro mio*. Come, let us go on. It is a long row to the Sasso,

and the mamma will be returning shortly after midnight."

They continued their way, stepping softly down the steep, crooked little street of Susello, already abed with candles out, save in one or two houses. But softly as they trod, the village curs sniffed them out and rushed yapping to windows and garden walls. In one room a woman was trouncing a naughty child, and the *babbo* standing by and remonstrating weakly.

"Hear him," said Dione. "That is the great passion of our Italian men—their children—though the foreigners write books and say that it is women."

"Yes, the fathers are mothers also with us, and it is the best good in our men. Hark! He has taken away the child. He won't have him beaten any more."

The little one's snuffling sobs of assuagement, coming evidently from the refuge of its father's breast and muffled in his neck, followed them down the street. Then they turned, passed the quaint old church, and barking and sobbing died away.

But before they began the long descent to San Maurizio they paused for a moment, arrested by the grim majesty of the Sasso di Ferro, as it reared its dark cowl among the stars, silent, stupendous, uninhabited by men, the haunt of eagles, its roots of twisted stone striking down

to waters that had never been fathomed, its vast folds wimpling on one side toward Laveno, like the hide of some prehistoric monster too loose for its gaunt bones; its horned snout jutted toward Luino, as though scenting some prey for which it need not hasten, but which would come by destiny into its jaws.

"*È diabolico!*" whispered Cecca, shuddering. "I feel its powers even here. I do not think that I can let you go to that baleful mountain in the night-time. I fear that ill might come to you."

"It is not baleful," said Dione. "It is only apart and clean from men, and very austere. It is Pan's Mountain. It is the one place that he has left on this lovely lake, which was once all his—the one place where men cannot build and breed, and which they cannot sully with their stupid laughings and weepings and little pinchbeck sins and virtues. The iron road goes through its entrails, but the trains flash back and forth so quickly that it is no more than a darting pain in the entrails of a beast. It is Pan's beast—Pan's shaggy monster. He caresses its rough sides, and sleeps against its haunch, and when none are within hearing he plays god-music upon his pipes of reed, and only the *passera solitaria* (the little lonely bird) pipes back to him; for besides her there are no song-birds that nest there, only great eagles with rusty wings and crooked, well-sharpened beaks. *Evoë*, Pan! Pan! Pan!"

ended the girl, lifting up her voice in a great, clear cry.

Cecca seized her arm, and shook her to and fro sharply, as when she had been a naughty child.

"Silence!" said she. "Do you want folk to think that there is a madwoman loose on the mountains and come after us with torches? *Madonna mia!* are you not afraid to shout the name of your pagan gods in the very face of Holy Church, and the cemetery of San Maurizio to be passed in a few moments? Do you make that noise again I shall dump the basket over this wall, and not another step forward will I take with you this night."

"Cecca," said Dione, soberly, smoothing back her sleeve where her nurse's vehement fingers had creased it, "you are just as bad as I am. You believe in witches and throw spells against them, and you know that the Church forbids you to have anything to do with witches whatever."

"Oh, that you were little again and I had the spanking of you!" was Cecca's only retort.

Then she started violently, as Dione, in her turn, grasped the arm nearest her, saying, "Look!"

"What is it? . . . What is it?" gasped Cecca, and she crossed and recrossed herself.

"Nothing to be afraid of," whispered the girl. "Only Pan's torch coming up behind the Sasso. See the glow from it, as from a town on fire! Look, Cecca, look! . . . Is it not wonderful!"

A deep saffron glow, soft but intense, was spreading, spreading behind the horny crest of the crouching mountain. It was as though the dark scales of its hide emitted a steam of phosphorus, or as though its silent breath was lighted by inward fire. Through this great veil of light the scattered stars that had not yet gone out in it glittered delicately, as might sparks of mica drifting against a sunset cloud.

Then, all at once, with the pang of a sudden note of music, the clear rim of the moon stole up against its edge, gently, stealthily, as though, in some madcap prank of a girl-goddess, she would catch the great god sleeping, and gild for him his little goat feet before he woke to find her far beyond his reach—high in air above the rough husk of the earth over which he ruled.

Up and up she crept, ever clearer, more brilliant.

"Feel it!" cried Dione. "Feel the earth falling forward through space with us. Do you see the edge of the Sasso dip and dip in pulse-beats as it turns with the turning of the earth."

"I feel that you are going mad," said Cecca, fiercely, "and that I will be going mad also if I stand here listening to you. That is what I feel. So if you want any more help from me you will just come down this hillside with me as fast as your two feet can carry you. I am regretting with a heavy heart that I ever let you coax me into coming with you at all."

"*Na*, *na*, Cecca *mia*," murmured Dione, coaxingly, as they went down the hill together. "Don't you know it's all just poetry that I'm feeling? I can't put it into a book, but I can feel it in my blood, and who knows if that is not even better? If you read what I say in a book, *cara* Cecca, you would say, 'Eh! What fine poetry!' But as you can only hear it from my lips, you say, 'Madonna! What craziness!' Now that is the whole truth, I assure you, Cecca *mia*."

"Well, that does not save you," growled Cecca, "for I've always held that poetry is a sort of madness, and many sensible people hold the same belief. So you had better be silent if you want me to carry out this crazy errand with you — at least, till we have passed the cemetery."

"Very well, I will be silent," said Dione.

CHAPTER VII

THEY went under the silent portico of San Maurizio, ivory and ebony in the just-risen moonlight, along the twisting stone steps to the highroad, past the cemetery, where, in one newly built, pretentious, empty tomb, a light burned all night long, and so down to the shore in safety.

"*Ciao!*" said Cecca. "The Madonna be thanked. It is always a great test of my faith to pass that cemetery."

The picturesque little hat factory of rubble, that sat with its toes in the lake, was soon left behind, and a few yards more brought them to the *Osteria del Pesce d'Oro* (Tavern of the Gold Fish), in which lived Ping, the padrone and the guardian of Dione's rowboat.

They could see no light from the road where they stood.

"Is it possible that lazy *baloss* (scamp) is abed already—perhaps drunk?" said Cecca.

"*Dà la vos*" (Give the voice), said Dione, in dialect.

"Ohé! . . . Ping! . . . Ping!" called Cecca.

"*Avanti . . . Avanti*," came the prompt reply, evidently from a full mouth.

"The pig!" growled Cecca. "He is eating at this hour of the night, and drinking, too, I'll wager."

She mounted the stone stair, banged open the door with her open palm, and she and Dione entered the small, stuffy room.

Ping was seated on a backless carved chair that had once ornamented the *sala* of some villa, with a huge bowl of *risotto* and fish between his knees, and a scarred, one-eyed, cynical-looking cat on his shoulder.

The cat humped her back as they entered and stood up in a loop, with all four feet close together and her tail stiff like a handle.

"*Voglino star servite?*" said Ping, with the usual formula; then added, with a grin: "*È molto furba* (she's mighty cunning). She thinks you're coming to eat with me, and that there will not be much left for her."

Then he caught sight of Dione.

"*Scusi . . . scusi*," said he, and, jumping up, shrugged the cat onto the floor, and trundled out two evil-looking stuffed chairs from a dark corner.

"Thank you," said Dione, "we have not time to sit down. I only want my boat."

"Instantly," said Ping, wiping his glistening mouth on the back of his hand, and the back of

his hand on one of the chairs. "I come at once."

"I am sorry to interrupt your supper," said Dione.

"*Niente, niente,*" replied he, cheerfully. "First a mouthful of fresh air, then a mouthful of *risotto.* It will taste all the better. But may I not give the Sciora Dione a drop of wine? I have some excellent Chianti . . ."

"Hear him!" said Cecca. "The very wine would blush redder to hear you call it Chianti."

"But I assure you, Sciora Cecca, 'tis Chianti, and of the best."

"*Via!*" said Cecca. "Do not add lie to lie, but hurry with that boat for which the Signorina is waiting."

"I come," said he, resignedly.

Ping, whose real name was Rodolfo, but who had always been called "Ping," was decidedly a *baloss* and a gypsy by nature if not by birth. He was unmarried, and the Osteria del Pesce d'Oro would have fared badly if an old aunt of his had not consented to act as padrona for a small consideration — how small only she and Ping knew, for she was ashamed to tell it, even as a grievance, and he was too astute.

He could stick to no regular occupation, but did odd jobs about, as the mood took him, and was at present acting as grave-digger at San Maurizio.

He was a small, wiry imp, with the head of a

Digger Indian, yet good-looking despite it, and, though he had no lawful wife, it was said that the little Pings would have filled a mammoth pin-cushion. He was, indeed, a man of "good fortunes," of good-nature, of good wit, and of absolutely no morals.

Cecca had vexed him about the so-called Chianti, and as they went down the pebbly shore he sought to get even with her.

"Eh, Mamma Cecca," said he, "do you not know that your *stregascia* has been seen abroad to-night? I wonder that you are afraid to be out at this hour. Only this morning I made a fine new broom of twigs, and behold! when I went to sweep off the steps with it this evening it was gone!"

"First of all," retorted Cecca, tartly, "I desire that you do not address me as 'Mamma.' The saints be praised I am no relation to you whatever. In the second place, you are a *busardon* (a great liar), as all the world knows. *You* sweep the steps! . . . You would sweep the sky with a witch's broom truly if the stars were ten-lire pieces, and that is all the sweeping that you would ever do!"

"'Tis probable," said Ping, good-humoredly. "*La Peppa!* What a fine sweeping that would be to-night!" he added, glancing up at the glittering sky as he got into his leaky little dingey to go after the *Am-pias-a-mi*.

This name of Dione's boat was a real trial to Cecca. A name in dialect was no name for a "Sciora's" boat, she insisted, and suggested "*Duilio*," or "*Dandolo*," or "*Verbano*," but in vain.

"'*It-pleases-me*' is just the name for it, as it does please me," Dione always replied. "And, besides, no one else has a boat with that name."

"I believe you, indeed," retorted Cecca, unconvinced.

The *Am-pias-a-mi* was a stout boat, safe in all weathers, with seats for two rowers and places for four in the stern. She was painted a light-gray, with her name in white. Dione would have dearly loved to have a sail-boat, but her mother had shrieked at the idea, and even her calm father had objected. He thought that feminine lake, with its changeful humours and gusts of hysteric passion, its sudden mountain hail-storms and *buffs* of wind, coming no one could tell whence or why, no place for a girl alone to try her skill at sailing. So the *Am-pias-a-mi* had been the compromise.

She was moored rather close in, and Ping's voice, as he bent up and down, bailing her out (a thing that he should have done that morning and that filled Cecca with indignation), came to them clearly over the still water.

"Eh, Sciora Dione," said he, "when are you

going to let me row you to troll for *lusc* (pike) again?"

"I don't know, Ping. I am tired of fishing for *lusc* and getting none. I believe the fishermen have drained the lake of fish, fishing, as they do, in and out of season."

"Eh, but the *lusc* are too clever for them. There has never yet been made the net that can hold them surely. But it is true, Sciora, that they seem to be getting scarce. I've only caught two myself so far."

Then he stood up to ease his back, and fell to grinning as he rubbed it.

"Eh, but that was a big *lusc* they caught at Intra this morning," said he.

"What did it weigh? Who caught it?" asked Dione, humouring him. She was as impatient as Cecca, but she knew that to hurry Ping was only to lose time.

"Three brave boys caught it with grapnels, it was so big," returned he, grinning more widely than ever. "It was swelled up like a barrel, and it stank—Madonna! how it stank!"

"Sciora, bid him be silent!" cried Cecca, outraged. "It is that poor *fioeu* (lad), who was drowned four days ago, that he is speaking of. The Madonna pardon you for using her name in that way, you bowelless ape!" she wound up, addressing Ping.

"No, truly, Sciora Cecca, I meant no harm,"

protested Ping, who really had not. "I wept like a baby when the poor mother let out a shriek that could have been heard at the Sasso, and fell back like one dead on the hard stones. Do you pardon me, Sciora Dione? I have a rough tongue, perhaps, but my heart is as soft as polenta."

"Certainly," said Dione, quite pale. "I am sure that you meant no harm. But it is not well to jest about such things. Please bring the boat now, for I have no time to lose."

Ping rowed in, using one oar like a gondolier, and they mounted upon the rough *banchetta*, which looked exactly like one of those strange, straddling insects called "devils' darning-needles."

Then Cecca threw in the red cushions which she had carried over one arm, and Dione stepped past Ping and took the oars.

"Good-night! . . . Good diversion, Sciora!" called Ping after them.

Cecca only grunted, but Dione said: "Good-night, Ping, and thanks."

"Now, Gioia," said Cecca, when he had re-entered the Osteria and closed the door, "you are to row me, if you please, to that little clump of trees under the Villa Ada, and leave me there while you go on your wild errand. I will do much for you, as I hope I have proved, but even with you I will not row over to that bolic mountain in the dead of night."

"Very well," said Dione. "But had you not rather go and see some friend in the village?"

"And let that witch's shawl-pin tell it all over the place to-morrow how I left you to gad about over Lago Maggiore by yourself? *Mai più!*" (Not much!) replied Cecca. "I have my knitting and a book of good magic as well as a prayer-book in my pocket, so I am well protected. And with your leave I will take this cushion to sit on, and then I shall have comfort also."

"Do exactly as you like, *cara*. A thousand thanks to you for coming with me. Here we are at the Villa Ada! Leave the basket there on that seat near me. Now . . . Have you both feet well on the *banchetta? Ebbene! Ciao!* . . . I shall be back in about two hours."

"The Virgin take care of you," said Cecca, making the sign of the cross over her. "*Ciao, Tesoro mio*. See that you do nothing like magic, as you have promised me."

"I shall do no magic truly, Cecca dear. Indeed, I know none to do."

"*Ebbene, ciao ancora,* and the Madonna go with you."

Dione left her old nurse sitting under the clump of acacias, and, fixing her course by the high white wall of the lower terrace of the villa, began to row toward the Sasso di Ferro.

CHAPTER VIII

THE moon span high, like a golden quoit asleep with speed. The lake was as still as the breast of a woman who holds her breath under a kiss. From Stresa toward Locarno the pearl-dust of the Milky Way swept in a vast bow. The stars in the heavens and the stars of the lights on Monterone and the lower hillsides quivered as with one life in the gray veil of the night.

Looking up at the Villa Ada, Dione saw the serried ivory columns of its tall eucalyptus-trees gleaming in the moonlight. Its cypresses were jets of darkness against the spangled air. Little Ghiffa, to her right, glowed like a flight of fireflies blown out along the water; to her left was Intra, another swarm, strung into a necklace as by a wanton child, then cast glimmering upon the shore.

She turned and looked over her shoulder. Dark, silent, menacing, promising, Pan's Mountain dozed upon its shadow, and this huge shadow seemed to devour one-half of the whole splendor of the lake. Across it one silver thread of light ran taut. It seemed to Dione that she could hear

a sort of singing sound from this silver thread, as from the string of a great wind-harp.

She rowed on and on. Now she seemed to touch the edge of that grim shadow, but ever it receded, and she rowed on and on.

The sky throbbed with constellations. Hercules swung his glittering club across the zenith. Beyond darted the diamond head of Draco. Cygnus went wheeling to her left. She saw the fiery crouch of Leo, the pale eyes of the Lynx, Cassiopeia's golden chair tilting giddily, while there, just over her own mountain, Ursa Major reared himself, as though with blazing paws he would box little Ceredo from the hilltop.

Dione, who so seldom smiled, smiled nervously at this thought.

"*Ecco!*" said she to herself. "I must beware of the real 'panic' terror, for it is just a touch of that very thing that I am beginning to feel."

It was a comfort to see Masciett there at her feet, curled into a ball, with his tail swept across his nose like a big white fox-brush. Thus he always slept, like the half-wild creature that he was.

And now she really touched the hem of the shadow; she was entering it. Her teeth pressed hard together, and a strange, cold, stinging feeling brushed her from head to foot. She turned her head again. The gray scars on the mountain-side were opening and curving toward her. The

whole crest of the mountain tilted forward, leaned heavily on the soft night—a sleepy Titan, crushing the fair breast of the nymph that he had captured.

She rowed on and on, steadily, with long, even strokes, but her heart beat hard.

Now the shadow was all about her. The other shore was faint, and far away—a little foam of light upon the distance. Masciett growled in his sleep—a wolf's growl. Then she heard again only the sound of her oars in the water. But now she rowed more slowly. She knew how the stone-roots of the mountain knuckled into great gnarls and juts about its shore—and again she looked back across her shoulder. There, to her right, was the towering slab of limestone that had been rent from the Sasso's iron breast by some spasm of Nature and hurled into the depths, to stand upright as by a miracle. In vain had the Austrians used it for a target in the wars of the Italian independence. Scarred with cannon-shot, split from crown to base, it still glowered stanchly, erect, alert—Pan's grim watch-dog.

She rested on her oars for a moment, and the boat glided farther into the shadow with its own impetus. The drops falling from the lifted blades made the sound of water falling into a well—*tanc . . . tonc . . . tanc*. But it was deeper here than any well. She recalled how a sail-boat had been capsized here once by the

ricochetting gusts that dart from the Sasso when the winds are high, and how the divers from Genoa, who had been sent for to recover the bodies of those drowned, had dived and dived in vain, unable to reach any bottom because of the cold and pressure of the water at those stark depths. And the bodies were never found. Pan kept what he once held.

She made another short stroke or two, then held her breath and listened. The mountain overbent her now. Its craggy base was only a few yards off. In the dark caves and rifts she could hear the chuckling, hollow clack of the dark water. And she knew that huge leviathans of rock crouched under her—vast twisted limbs and snouts of stone, nuzzling down into the liquid blackness; a humped back here and there, and sometimes a fanged jaw with a gray tusk or two just rippling the surface.

She shipped her oars and waited. There was a slight, sliding grind. Her keel had grazed one of the monster's backs. Up started Masciett with his wolf-snarl.

"*Sta quièt!*" whispered Dione, and he lay down, ears forward. Another muffled grating, a jar or two, and the boat laid with her nose on the bleak shore, fawningly as it were, like a thing waiting for either a rebuff or a caress.

Dione sat perfectly still, and looked upward. She was under a great half cavern of slabbed

limestone. Above, a thick fell of hazel shrubs matted the iron ribs of the mountain to its jagged backbone, and there bristled sparse and stiff against the sky like a wild-boar's mane. There was absolutely no sound save that hollow, clucking clack of water and the clear fluting of a cricket, little guardian of the lighted hearths of men, astray in the sinister gloom of Pan's Mountain.

The girl drew a deep breath, then stood up in the softly heaving boat that seemed breathing with another's breathing, and lifted the little basket from the seat. She drew another breath, another still, then sent up her strong young voice in a clear cry:

"*Evoë!* Pan! Pan! Pan!"

The dog started to his feet and stood rigid.

"*Evoë!* Pan! Pan! Pan!" cried Dione again. Then once again: "*Evoë!* . . . Pan! . . . Pan! . . . Pan!"

Utter stillness fell. Then suddenly, down from the mountain crest, sheer down, through scrub and hazel boughs, with the pattering noise of little goat feet coming fast, a stone fell through the darkness, fell and fell.

Masciett's scruff rose from collar to tail-root, and, thrusting up his muzzle, he gave the querulous, wavering cry of the "Wolf at fault."

"*Sta quièt!*" breathed Dione, fiercely. She thrust him back with her foot as he sought to come toward her.

"*Sta lì!*" (Stay there!) she ordered.

He stood motionless, with head low, tail drooping, his ruff erect, his ears pricked forward like a shape in snow.

Dione, with the basket on one arm, took the painter of the boat in her other hand, and, poising lightly on the bow, sprang ashore, using as stepping-stones the wet knuckles of limestone that glistened between her and the two-foot band of shaley beach. Then she wound the painter about a pointed rock and stood up.

The dog stayed like the stones about him. The cricket had ceased its fluting. The other shore was so far and dim that it seemed like those tiny landscapes seen sometimes against the eyelids as sleep is coming.

Dione set the basket upon a ledge and laid aside the linen cloth. She took the little cup of magnolia leaves, and, feeling along the surface of the crag, set it in a narrow cleft. Then she lifted the *fiasco* of red wine, and, with a deft turn of her wrist, cast off the inch of olive-oil that sealed it.

Masciett followed her every movement with quivering eyes, but his body never stirred.

When she had done these things, Dione held out her arms and cried again to Pan.

"*Evoë*, great Pan!" she cried. "See, I bring thee offering of cream and honey, and I pour thee libation of pure red wine. Bring home my mate

to me from among all other men, and grant that our sons be strong and wise."

Then she turned the slender neck of the wine-flask toward the earth, and the dark stream poured out upon the rock, splashing back against the hem of her white gown and across her instep.

"*Evoë! Evoë*, Pan!" she cried, as the wine ran from her hand. "Out of all the world, I alone make thee libation. Grant my request."

Silence, utter and heavy: the still dog; the ominous lift of rock above her; the heaving boat; these were the same, yet there seemed a change working. Something quickened in the dark air.

She felt her scalp tighten upon her head with the lifting of her hair—a rill as of cold-fire poured down her limbs. Her heart seemed to open and shut within her breast, like the wings of a resting moth. She trembled, and at the same moment the dog howled again.

With shaking hands she loosed the painter, sprang into the boat, thrust off from shore. The panic-terror had her. . . . She seemed to see a dark shape stirring there on the crag above her . . . to hear the clattering of little hooves among the stones. . . . She thought that a bark of laughter followed her. . . . She thought that the cruelty of the old gods was in it. . . . Then came a clear sound of piping. . . . Was it the strayed cricket? . . . Was it the reed of Pan?

. . . Masciett pressed close, and licked her hands and throat unrebuked. She held him tight, and they shivered together.

Then mastering herself, shaking off the clinging terror as one shakes an evil insect from one's hand, she stood erect again, and as the boat glided out toward the shores where men built and bred, she lifted up her voice once more, and hailed the god who dwells alone.

"*Evoë!* Pan! Pan! Pan!" she cried, and this time Echo, the beloved of Pan, answered her, so that the whole dark mountain throbbed to it, and she went forward in her slight boat with that once so mighty name falling in a sleet of sound about her . . . Pan! Pan! Pan! . . .

CHAPTER IX

KENT was striding, as with seven-league boots, up the mountain-side toward Ceredo. The blither his mood the faster he always walked, and the peasants in San Maurizio and Susello looked after the *mat Inglese* and grinned. "He has been lunching and has probably tried *grappa* with his wine for the first time," they decided.

"Yes, and it's a very good thing that he didn't plunge into the lake for a swim on a full belly," said the dwarf shoemaker, who was considered a wise person. "That is what most of them do. Ay, Santa Maria! haven't I seen three of 'em drown with my own eyes from that foolishness, and one poor devil with his wife calling to him from the terrace of the Ghiffa Hotel please not to make faces—it frightened her. . . . And he knotted up with cramp all the time, and dying with every swallow of water. . . . They are certainly crazy—the English. It is no superstition."

"No, it is certainly not a superstition," agreed the others.

In the mean time Kent had swept through Susello, and was out among the vineyards, hat

and coat tucked under arm and stick through elbows behind him. His thin, blue cotton shirt was open at the throat, his worn, white flannel trousers rolled high from his ankles. He was stockingless in the low cord shoes of the peasants of the region, and dripping wet, and completely happy.

In the pocket of his bundled coat there was a well-digested sheaf of notes. He pressed it gleefully against his side as he thought of it. In his brain was an up-streaming shower of thought-sparks, each ready to blaze into full being with the first breath of the spirit that waited on him. He looked down at the gleaming, swarming valley, and laughed; up at the black-blue of the cloudless sky, and laughed again—a joyful, satiate laugh, that yet had in it no satiety. He laughed because "it was so good to be alive, by God!" and because it had occurred to him that the sky was like the huge blue cup and the earth like the glittering ball with which he would play cup-and-ball in the good game of life.

Yes, he was completely happy, and he was not in love, and, strangely enough for a poet, he considered this the most gorgeous sort of happiness. Being in love interfered with his work and set a sort of mawkishness in his verse, as of honey that has sugared and clogged. . . . At least, such was his opinion, and he was a very fair critic of his own performance. Being happy in love, he

thought, was something like being a god drunk on ambrosia—one saw mentally double. Being happy in a creative mood and out of love was like being a god just exultant with sheer godhead. Besides, love had once singed his wing-feathers to the bone.

His brow pinched into a scowl of pain for an instant, and he wrenched his chin upward as though loosening something from about his throat. The sting passed. His sovereign mood sucked out the poison like the staunch queen of old. Up he strode toward Ceredo, a king toward the happy hut of his incognito.

He rounded a hillside, and Monte Rosa leaped at him in a shout of white. The lake reeled off below, a bobbin of silver-blue flung from a star. The green web of the forests, draped over cliff and hollow, seemed to sway listlessly in the thick-sweet breeze.

"One can feel the earth swing up here," thought he. "What a glorious giddiness . . ."

He threw himself flat on the steaming grass, and, setting chin on laced hands, gazed down into the grape-gray gulfs of air. Then he drew in his vision, and became absorbed in the swarming life about him. It was like looking into the green hair of Goddess Nature, tricked out with little glistening, living ornaments.

A June beetle, more gorgeous than an emerald, and lacquered with brown-gold, made fool-

ish attempts to walk with dignity along a supple blade of grass. Ever he tried, and ever the blade bent as he reached its tip, and stood him on his silly, burnished head.

An ant, the color of cochineal, went up a weed and down the other side, and up another and down the other side, thus progressing in a straight line, but defying Euclid, and not making it the shortest way between two given points.

"Silly soul," Kent said to her. "And why do you carry that great gauze wing in your jaws? . . . Gauze is not good to eat. . . . And the ant queen doesn't wear gowns."

Then a small Italian katydid, opening its green mouth on either side and showing a pink lining like a fig's, fixed his attention.

"By Jove!" cried he, softly, after watching it a moment. "It is 'doing' its front hair, like a woman!"

Slowly the "katy," with its oblong head and pink-topaz eyes that looked impartially on either side at once, took one of its long, blond antennæ in its little fore feet and drew it out to its full length. It then waved it once or twice, and laid it along its back as though satisfactorily smooth. It next arranged the other antenna. It then considered a moment, and, poising itself nicely on some of its legs, curled up its oat-green body and proceeded to clean it as a cat cleans hers. It then stretched far out one hinged hind leg, drew

it musingly through its fig-like mouth, and propped it up again. It went through this same proceeding with the other. Then it chewed a neat semicircle out of a young leaf of the vine on which it was balanced, and vibrating the little triangular cape of brown gauze just back of its head, emitted a loud "chirring" noise which lasted for about a minute. It then considered again, and suddenly, with a violent burst of resolution, flew straight into Kent's interested face.

"Then you don't do it with your hind legs, after all?" asked he, gently straddling it upon the vine once more. "Lord! Lord! . . . What a sense of humor went to your making, my small green friend."

He lay on his face for a few minutes more, then turned over and sprawled luxuriously, staring up into the air until tiny globules of crystal seemed to rise and rise before his eyes like the bubbles in an enchanted and invisible goblet of wine. He was so very happy that he had to dawdle. One must not get to one's Ceredo and a summer of brimming, golden work too soon. It is wisdom to loiter on the way. It is the wisdom of all wisdom to stay one's feet on the staircase of creative joy.

"Scribble, scribble, scribble . . . scribble, scribble, scribble," thought Kent, enjoying his lonely, wise-foolishness to the last atom of his blood. "I can see the little black lace of words

spinning out on the page now. . . . O man, but it is a queer miracle you are, and as droll as the little green grasshopper, to take your highest joy in such a thing as that! And to think of the chaps who dictate and thump things out on a typewriter!"

With this he leaped to his feet again, and swung on up the mountain.

Little Ceredo, among its fields, like a pretty, pale girl with red hair and a green frock, he took to his heart at once. His padrona was a slight, dusky woman with the feathery, line-like eyebrows, and broad-lidded eyes set wide apart, that one sees in Luini's frescoes. She spoke to him with an unaccustomed tongue, in stilted Italian, and showed him to his room with many gentle excuses for its simplicity. Kent loved it and her at once. He thanked her so enthusiastically that her clear brown cheek flared like an autumn pear.

"*È molto bravo—molto simpatico,*" she told her son when she went down again. "He is without doubt a *scior* (gentleman)."

And Kent was saying to himself:

"I must pick up the dialect as fast as I can, to talk with these delightful people. I can't stand that peg-legged Italian they use. It's as if that dear little soul were moving about me on gold stilts."

For he had a passion for dialects, as coming near to the bone and core of things, besides know-

ing Italian almost as well as he did English. He had spent the first ten years of his life in Florence with his mother and a series of tutors, for he had been a somewhat trying boy. Afterward there had been a private school in England, and then Oxford. Unlike most poets, he had graduated with distinction from his University.

His little room, smelling of whitewash and fresh linen, and opening onto a balcony arustle with leaves, pleased him mightily. He stood and smiled at the glazed print of the Virgin over his bed. She was a hooded lady all in blue and pink, with an aura of gold spikes from crown to toe, and she stood with demure eyes, downcast, balanced nicely upon the head of a little boy-angel in a crescent that looked both hard and sharp.

"I'm sure that dear Luini person took this from the head of her own bed to hang over mine," mused he.

CHAPTER X

HE then went out upon the balcony, and saw the mountain-side tumbling beneath him to the lake, and, beyond, the implacable Stone of Iron.

He gazed at it for some moments in silence. Then he said aloud:

"Hail, Dante! . . . For that mountain was surely made in your image, and in your likeness."

He swept the lake with his eyes: laughing Stresa to the right, and the glistening Borromean Isles drifting on the delicate water, like great Brazilian beetles blown out from land. To the left, Cannero Castle on yet another island, and the already purpling peaks toward Switzerland. Then his eyes came back to the Sasso.

"*Salute!*" said he. "You look like a Behemoth dozing after a gorge of pterodactyls or ichthyosaurs, or some of those grim fowls." [Kent's knowledge of biology was of the haziest.] "Or, no; the Behemoth was a sort of huge tapir, I believe, and the other creatures reptiles" [this much did come back to him]. "You are more like Leviathan asleep for the time being. . . .

'Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a hook? . . . or bore his jaw through with a thorn? . . . Will he make many supplications unto thee? Will he speak soft words unto thee? Will he make a covenant with thee? Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? Or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?' . . . No, I should not like to make a covenant with you. You would be apt to open your stone jaws and crunch me whole by way of keeping it. As for binding you for a maiden, I should as soon think of giving her the Minotaur to play with. . . . By Jove! You are rather an overpowering *vis-à-vis* to breakfast and lunch and dine with. I shall have to pour you a propitiatory libation before I dare drink my wine at meals, for this balcony is to be my dining-room, O monster, even if I do have to sit with the hind legs of my chair over the threshold."

He gazed at the mountain a while longer. There seemed to float from it a silent force that held him oddly. Then he ran down-stairs to consult his padrona and her big son Pedring about the coming of his luggage.

"It started from Intra at a good hour this morning, Signore," said Pedring. "It should be here at any moment."

And, in fact, as he was speaking, a cart with a big gray horse hove in sight, and beside it a stout, broad-backed woman, chattering shrilly to the driver as she walked, doubled over be-

neath Kent's summer supply of books. These, in their two oblong cases, she carried on her back in a rectangular basket, such as the Indians of Alabama use for carrying kindling-wood and papooses.

Kent bestowed upon driver and woman tips which agreed with their preconceived ideas of the foolish generosity of the *Inglesi*. Then, with Pedring's help, he got his belongings up-stairs, and spent the afternoon in arranging his quarters. The room that had been given him to sleep in he turned into a study because of the balcony, and the other, at the side of the house, he took for his bedroom. He was very orderly at the beginning of a creative epoch, so it took him until seven o'clock to get settled. At that hour, upon a little green table on the balcony, with the "hind legs" of his chair, as he had foreseen, straddling the threshold, he partook of a large bowl of *pasta asciutta al pomo d'oro*, a salad of big green peppers and cucumbers, some *gorgonzola*, such as one cannot get even in Milan, some cherries that looked like little apples and smelled of honey, and a bottle of the light, silken wine of Solcio, which his padrona's brother sent her as a present every year.

"I drink to you, O Dark One," said he, gravely, as he finished this excellent repast, lifting his glass toward the Sasso. "Pray do not frown at me like that. . . . I will even make libation to you, as I said."

And he flung out the last drops into the clear air toward the mountain.

Then joyous, content, "friends" with himself and all the world, atingle with the necessity for movement, he lit his best beloved brier out of eight, and, catching up his stick, went hatless out into the dusk for one of those nocturnal prowls dear to wood things and to poets.

He walked at random, striking out of the village and up the mountain-side, with a gay "*Buona sera*" for every man, woman, child, and cur that he met. Soon he was off the highroad. The vineyard closed about him. The sweet pang of crushed wild thyme and mint shot through his nostrils. Then came a dizzying gush of honeysuckle. "Oh, you are like the breath of one's first love! . . . You go sharp to one's head . . ." said he aloud, in the way he had. "Lord! What a night! . . . One would think that Satan invented Eden and not God. . . . Night, you are a treacherous minx. . . . And when you come with woodbine in your hair like this, you are nothing less than the Scarlet Woman, with your red gown seeming sober in the moonlight. . . . I don't like these little tingles in my blood. . . . They presage evil. . . . I won't look again at that glow where the lady moon is coming up. . . . The train of associations is too disastrous. . . . I'll think in German, where the moon is 'he.' . . . Verily, I believe I'm a little tipsy. . . ."

And he stopped to knock out his pipe against a stone wall, and laughed softly at the idea, for his head was metal where wine was concerned.

As he pocketed his pipe, and looked up, the wall itself took his attention; it was so high, so old, so moss-and-wild-flower grown—such plumy, caressing foliage waved over its gray top.

"I'll climb you!" said he. "There! . . . You dared me to, you know. . . ." And he was on the other side.

Though the moon-glow quickened the dark air, he could see but dimly where he was. Cool leaves slapped his face with a trick as of provocative, light finger-touches, little supple branches sprang against him, a great festoon of honeysuckle caught him across the lips. He kissed at it, laughing again. "Musky wanton!" said he.

Then he won through into a little glade, and, as the breeze veered, heard the vibrant sound of water coming down into a pool from a great height.

"A mountain pool! . . . A plunge by starlight in this air. . . . "

He pressed toward the sound, eager, aquiver for the cold clasp of water about his bare limbs, already loosening his collar as he went. But two yards farther he stopped short, taking a quick step backward. There below him, in its cup of ferny, wood-clad rocks, lay the pool, dark and clear, like a magic mirror fed by the white

foam of a cascade. It was not the sheer fall of the bank that had arrested him, however, but so strange a glimpse, as behind the witched veil of night—so strange a gleam as from the old, lovely, not-to-be-believed-in world of naiads and hamadryads—that he thought for an instant the wine was truly in his brain. . . . He stood throbbing, his breath held.

"*Pst!*" came a sharp whisper. Then again: "*Pst! Pst!*" As he stood bemused, with a crackling sound there leaped toward him from the underbrush a white wolf with lifted lip and fangs shining.

Three bounds took Kent back again over the high wall. He heard the wolf-thing leap scrabbling against the stones. . . . Incontinently he turned and fled, higher and higher, through vineyards, across fields, over ditches, across a stream. . . . Breathless at last, he threw himself down upon a hillside.

"Good Lord!" said he, and took his head between both hands as though to steady it. . . . "Good Lord!" . . . What he had seen was the flash of a white arm and flank out of the spray, delicate yet distinct as the trace that a falling star leaves on the dark air.

CHAPTER XI

"SIGNORA CIELO," said Kent the next morning, when his padrona came to bring him his breakfast (her lovely name was Laura Cielo), "my dear Signora, I fear that the delicious wine that your brother sends you from Solcio is very strong indeed."

"But no, Signore. Truly," protested she, "it is so light that a babe might suck it from the bottle and not be injured."

"Strange," said Kent, musingly. "Have you any witches about here?"

"Witches, Signore?"

She looked troubled, and "made horns" behind her back.

"Yes, witches . . . fairies . . . enchanted persons."

"About fairies I never heard, Signore. As for witches"—her fingers were firmly set in the sign against evil—"the Signore must know how ignorant people talk in all quarters of the world."

"Ah! . . . So there *are* witches, then . . . white witches, I hope?"

"*Scusi*, Signore; but the Signore will please

taste this butter before I go, and tell me if it is quite fresh."

She set before him the little pot of old Lodi-ware with its posy of orange nasturtiums stuck through the handle, and became very busy, laying the green table on the balcony with honey, fresh eggs, rye-bread, cream, and smoking coffee that had no chiccory in it. Laura Cielo prided herself upon her coffee.

"So you do not wish to talk about it?" asked Kent, after tasting the butter as requested, and saying that he was sure that it was made of cream skimmed from the Milky Way, so entirely heavenly was it.

Laura smiled, and shrugged her shoulders.

"It is as well not to begin the day with such talk," said she.

"Very well," said Kent. "There can be no objection, I suppose, to my asking the name of that very imposing mountain opposite?"

"The Signore is merry this morning," said Laura, with her soft, indulgent smile of the born mother. "My Pedring is always gay in the morning also. It is a very good thing for the health, . . . and for the wives and mothers," she added, slyly. Then, becoming serious again: "That mountain, Signore, is called the Stone of Iron. It is not friendly to men, I believe. There is one small village on the other side called Vararo. We believe it to be so called because people

go there so rarely. But perhaps that is only fancy. It has eaten several men, that mountain. . . . *Brutta bestia!*" (Ugly beast!) said she, addressing it. "Only last year a poor fellow rolled from its top onto the rocks and was *schiscia* (smashed) . . . just spattered about," she ended with an expressive gesture.

They both regarded it in silence for a moment.

"I see no particular use in the world for a mountain like that, do you, Signora?" asked Kent at last.

"God, who made it, alone can tell," answered she. "But, after all, those hazel bushes that cover it make good charcoal. They belong to the Ospedale Maggiore, in Milan, I am told. See where the wood-cutters have cleared this year. . . . That long stripe, like a stocking hung up to dry. . . . Yes, the hazel wood on it is of use."

"Hazel wood is also good against witches, isn't it?" said Kent, mischievously. But Laura only shook her head at him with another smile, and made her escape.

"And now," said Kent, after his postprandial pipe, with a long, long stretch, and wriggle of *ennui*—"now for a call on the Signora Pupin or Rupin or whatever her name is . . . who got me these jolly lodgings."

He took Varoni's letter of introduction from his pocket and regarded it with much distaste.

"'An' 'twere done, 'twere well 'twere done

quickly,'" said he at last. "I'll take one more day of loafing, and then for Leonardo and the Lady Lisa!"

Pedring pointed out to him the nearest way to Vareggio, which was not far at best, and, having attired himself properly in a fresher suit of white flannels, he betook himself to pay his duty call.

The way that Pedring had directed him did not lead him to the old iron gate, but to a small wicket set higher up in a stone wall. The height of this wall and its drapery of moss and wild flowers made Kent thoughtful for a moment. He looked back at it as he went down the steep path among thick growths of birch and poplar. Then he stopped short, as on the night before. . . . The high, vibrant song of water falling from a great height into a pool had caught his ear.

"This is interesting," thought he, with his low, self-communing laugh. "I wonder if . . . but no—never lady of the name of Pupin or Rupin bathed like a dryad in a mountain pool by starlight."

He arrived at the house, took a lazy glance at the view, and rang the door-bell.

Cecca opened to him, smelling of sweet, marjoram and thyme, which she had been preparing, and with her best headkerchief somewhat hastily assumed, and showing a lock of her iron-gray hair. The Signora and the Signorina were both

absent, it pained her to say. Would the Signore leave the letter with her? Would he have a little Marsala or a cup of coffee and some almond-cakes made with honey? The Signore thanked her a thousand times, but he had just breakfasted to repletion, and, yes, he thought that he would leave the letter with her, and also a thousand regrets. Just at this point Cecca tossed up her hands with a despairing gesture, and said "*Madonna mia!*" and Kent, turning hastily, came face to face with Dione. It was Dione's costume that had caused Cecca to call upon the Virgin, and for a moment Dione, who had rounded the corner of the house without dreaming that there could be a visitor at this early hour, was somewhat uncomfortable herself. Then she came forward, and said, in her clear, composed young voice:

"Good-morning, Signore. My mother is away to-day. I see that you have a letter. Can I be of service?"

Kent did not observe her closely at first. He was staring at Masciett, who, erecting his scruff slightly, stood and gazed back at him.

"He is not dangerous . . . unless I wish him to be," said Dione, mistaking the young man's fixed look for one of apprehension.

"He is very beautiful," said Kent, recovering himself. Then he told her who he was, and explained his errand.

"The mamma will be very sorry to have missed you," said Dione, politely. "If you care to stay a little while, Cecca will bring you some Marsala and almond-cakes."

"A thousand thanks, but I have just breakfasted," said Kent again.

"Surely," said Dione. "I think it a very stupid custom myself, but one is supposed to keep it. Shall we sit out here, or do you prefer to come into the *salottino?*"

"Signorina! . . . On such a morning?" exclaimed Kent.

"Yes, . . . it would be a pity," said Dione, and she caught in a few more ruffled locks with one of the two big silver hair-pins that held them.

Kent, without seeming to watch her, had now taken in every detail of her costume and appearance.

She had been to wash Masciett in the pool, and he shone like a thing of spun mica, though he was now taking mad, skating slides, head down, along the gravel, in the natural dog-desire to rub off the edge of his cleanness.

"Masciett, *va! Via!*" said Dione, and she waved him imperiously onto the grass.

At the same time that she bathed him she had shaken her hair about in the spray from the cascade. It was still frosted with moisture, and had left a dark patch on the shoulders of her green linen gown. This gown—shortened with

two large shield-pins, which she now began leisurely to unclasp—left exposed her fine round ankles and the long sweep of her bare insteps, rising stockingless from the black wooden *zoccoli* or peasants' pattens, with which she was shod. Her slim toes, even and faintly pink as a row of pale honeysuckle buds, escaped from the side bits of red leather laced over them, and gleamed wet and fresh in the sunlight.

She did not draw in her feet under the hem of her gown when she sat down at last to talk with Kent, but left them calmly where they would have rested had they been clad in the smartest of smart shoes.

As she pulled down her sleeves which had been rolled back over her long, beautifully tapering arms, Kent's eyes followed the pure line to the tips of the chiselled fingers with their clear, delicate nails.

"No, dear Signora Laura," thought he, "it was not your good wine of Solcio that was too strong. And my Muse and I have one secret at least, between us, which the world will never hear."

CHAPTER XII

"I CANNOT take my eyes from your dog," he then said, watching Masciett, who, piqued by some strange sound in the valley below, had reared himself up with both forepaws on the parapet of the terrace, thus showing the splendid outline of his deep girth and tucked-up waist to perfection. "What breed of dog is he? And what does his name mean? It is dialect, I suppose."

Dione told him the ancestry of Masciett, and explained his name.

"Yes, it is dialect," said she, "and it means 'Little Male.' . . . My father named him. He did not like sentimental names for animals."

"It suits him perfectly," said Kent. "I should like to know this dialect. It seems so crisp, and packed with idiom. I suppose you speak it very well, Signorina?"

"Yes. All children here speak dialect before Italian. They learn it from their *balie* (wet-nurses). As you say, it is very expressive. But it differs slightly with every place. In Stresa it is already different from what it is in Ghiffa. And the Milanese is again different."

"But only slightly so, is it not? My friend, Gigino Varoni, I've heard speak it with others, of course, but I've never stopped in Milan till this spring, and he always speaks Italian with me."

"Yes, a word here and there—the pronunciation."

"I must learn it," said Kent. "I shall begin with Pedring to-day."

"It would be difficult to learn, it seems to me," said Dione. "But perhaps you have a talent for languages?"

"I don't know about that," said Kent, with his gay smile. "I've a knack at dialects, though. I can hobnob with the gondoliers in their own *patois* like a native."

"You have been much in Italy?"

"I lived in Florence until I was ten. And since I was twenty-three I've been six months in Italy every year of my life."

"You like it?"

"It is my dear *balia* that I love along with my own mother."

"Sometimes one loves one's *balia* more than one's mother."

"Well, it is a very close thing, I confess," said Kent, smiling again.

"She seems rather commonplace," he thought; "yet she can't be, with that odd, striking face. I wonder if she is beautiful? Somehow I can't

make up my mind. Her body is certainly beautiful. And she has something fateful about her . . . like one of the Parcæ when they were young . . . Atropos, I think. I can fancy her, under certain circumstances, snicking three-fold cords, with those black brows of hers bent in a bow, and that mouth set thin and hard as the lip of a shell. . . . She isn't the least like an Italian girl . . . all Slav, I should say. Or no, perhaps just a dash of the Latin to give her that strange air. . . ."

Dione was sitting perfectly still, with one arm thrown out along the parapet, and her forceful, irregular profile turned toward him. Her face was in shadow, and out of this shadow her vivid mouth gleamed with a certain violence of contrast. It was not madder or crimson like the mouths of most women, but a golden scarlet, like rose-hips in winter.

"She can't be commonplace," concluded Kent, "it's impossible. I wonder what she's thinking now? Nothing that she'll speak of, I'll warrant."

Dione was looking at the Sasso, and thinking of Pan and her invocation of him. It was not likely that she would mention this to Kent. She was also thinking that Kent was the first real man, according to her idea of a man, that she had ever seen except her father. It was still more unlikely that she would mention this. She was also wondering if he could be the "mate from

among all other men" that she had asked Pan to send her, for she was not sure that she liked him. She had a queer impulse to spring up and leave him, and go far and fast in the opposite direction. This she thought strange, as people generally left her completely indifferent. She did not know that she was experiencing the primitive recoil of the woman in presence of the man destined to dominate. These last reflections, least of all, was she likely to confide to their subject.

"Is it very gay in Intra? Do you go out a great deal to balls and parties of all sorts, Signorina?" said Kent at last.

"No," said Dione. "I do not like them."

"You do not like to dance? But, with permission, you are made to dance, Signorina."

"If one could dance by one's self it might be pleasant," said Dione; "but to dance with men, on the top of whose heads one looks down, that is not agreeable at all."

Kent laughed out.

"You are certainly very tall for an Italian young lady, Signorina, and that is the truth," said he.

"Are the young girls in England so very tall, then?"

"As tall as I am, some of them."

"I should not like to be as tall as you are."

"Certainly not. It would be much too tall for a woman."

"But it is not for a man," said Dione, decidedly. "May I ask how tall you are?"

"Six feet two and a half inches—without my shoes, to be precise," said Kent, much amused. "I don't know how to put it into metres, as I was never able to master my multiplication-table."

"I could never learn arithmetic either, though my father worked over me with great patience."

"Then there is one taste, at least, that we have in common," said Kent, gayly.

"It is not a taste with me," returned Dione; "it is just a lack."

"Oh," thought Kent, "is it possible that she is literal?"

Then he reflected that there must be some method of "getting at" the real girl, under the husk of convention. "Let's see what she reads—if she reads," he told himself. "Well, if you do not care for society, you must read a great deal, do you not?" he said aloud.

Dione gave him a fleet, brushing glance. "I have read *I Promessi Sposi*," said she.

"Naturally," said Kent. "It is a famous novel. And then?"

"I have read *Picciola* and—" She paused to remember; then went on quickly: "And the *Graziella* of Lamartine, and part of *Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre*."

She stopped short, but this time she kept her eyes fixed upon his.

Kent was somewhat dashed, then a certain look in those thick-veiled eyes struck him. He opened his lips to speak, then closed them, then began to laugh. "Signorina," said he, "with permission, I believe that for some occult reason of your own you are putting me to a test."

To his surprise and delight Dione lifted her chin, and that soft, reedy laughter of hers rippled up from her full throat. They laughed and laughed.

Cecca, in her eyry of green-bowered kitchen window, pricked her ears. Was that her young *sciora's* rare laughter mingling so freely with the mirth of a strange man? "He must be a very witty *scior*, truly, to make the child laugh out like that," thought she. "Eh! Who knows? Perhaps 'tis the husband come at last. If he is as good as his looks, all will be well. *E ciao!*" said Cecca to herself.

"And may I ask," said Kent, when they were calm again, and only smiling joyously at each other—"may I venture to inquire if those four admirable books form the complete list of your reading?"

Dione shook her head, still smiling. "Oh, I read all sorts of things," said she.

They were quite at ease now. A man and woman who have laughed from the heart to-

gether can never be wholly apart again. Some subtle essence of each has been mixed in the cup of understanding, and that potent brew partaken of constitutes part, at least, of the ceremony in the marriage of true minds.

"Yes," thought Kent, "when she smiles she is beautiful." Aloud to her, he said:

"You say that very whimsically. Do you think that I shall be shocked at your reading 'all sorts of things'?"

"Your friend, the Signor Varoni, was much shocked."

"Oh, was he? . . . Now I strongly suspect that you put him to some such test as you put me . . . only of a different nature, perhaps. Was it not so?"

"I was only quite frank with him," said Dione, with demureness.

"The perfect frankness of a clever woman can be a severe test," said Kent, as demurely.

"Well," said Dione, "you see, he reminded me of those books that I mentioned to you, and asked me if I did not think them delightful. And I had almost forgotten the last three, which had bored me very much at the time, . . . and so . . . well, I was bored again, . . . and I just mentioned one of the books that had really interested me, though it did not please me."

"And that shocked him?"

"But enormously!"

"May I know what book it was?"

Dione looked at him quite grave again. "No," said she at last, "I have no desire to shock you. . . . Besides, though I do not think that you would be shocked, it is an unpleasant book to discuss."

"We need not discuss it," said Kent, really curious.

"If you please," said Dione, "I will not tell the name of that book."

Thought Kent: "I do not 'please' at all. I feel that in learning the name of that book I should learn much more. But when you set your mouth like that I suppose that things are settled."

"Very well," said he. "I should have liked to hear it—because, do you see?—Gigino Varoni is a dear chap, and not at all a fool, and I cannot help being a bit curious over what shocked him so greatly."

"I do not think," said Dione, with acumen, "that he would have been so shocked if an English girl had read it. You see, Italian girls are supposed to know nothing of what is under life . . . of the things that live under the waters, I might say. That is all. They are supposed just to float about in pretty, white, little boats, and ask their mammas before they go out whether they shall say '*Pere*' or '*Prugne*.'" She made the grimaces that correspond with these two words

as she uttered them, first simpering with her bright-red lips, then pursing them up as if for a kiss. "That is why he was shocked, you see. But, then, since you have been so much in Italy, you must know all this as well as I."

Here the old iron gate clanged, and shortly after Madame Rupin came up the path.

CHAPTER XIII

SHE was warm, and excited, and flustered, and very pleased. She was fashionably attired in a smart Milan gown and hat, both much too heavy for the day, and she kept inserting a little wad of damp handkerchief under her big, black-speckled, white veil as she talked, and patting away the perspiration that would gather about her eyes.

She had a right, indeed, to be pleased. Here within ten days was another possible husband for her trying child, and one, moreover, who was well born, rich, and distinguished—a real *scior* in his own exacting country. She had "pumped" the Varonin dry, you may be sure, on the subject of his gifted friend, and lo! here was the gifted friend himself, quite at home, and talking with that hard-to-please daughter of hers as if he were really enjoying himself.

She insisted upon his having some Marsala and almond-cakes first of all, and then, when he excused himself for the third time with the customary thousand of thanks, she insisted that he should stay to lunch with them. As he had dedicated this one more day to loafing, he ac-

cepted with pleasure. "And afterward," said the delighted lady, "afterward Dione can show you the Trinità. . . . Fortunate girl! She neither tans nor freckles. Do you, my treasure? . . . And she adores long walks, and never takes a *siesta* after luncheon, as we other poor, weak little women do. . . . She is so strong. . . . Like an English girl. . . . Yes, her father and I have brought her up very much like an English girl. . . . I allow her to take walks unchaperoned when it is with some one of whom I am quite certain. . . . Ah, you may rest assured that the Signora Varoni was not reserved in her accounts of you, *caro* Signore. . . . Yes, yes, it will be quite delightful to have so distinguished a visitor to lunch in our quiet little abode. . . ." Then suddenly she took a lightning squint down her pretty nose, and saw that it was very shiny indeed. "But now," said she, hurriedly, "I must take this little girl of mine to put on a proper dress, and go to consult my *donna di servizio* about the meal . . ."

And she tripped off on her slim, long-toed, high-heeled, champagne-colored, white-buttoned boots to powder that most aggravating little item in the sum of her good looks. Dione's costume and the *zoccoli* had almost caused her mother a fainting-fit when she first caught sight of them, but she had immediately reflected that the girl had such feet to bare as were probably not to

be matched in all Italy, and that men were "strange." . . . Perhaps these bare feet would accomplish what the most elaborate toilette could not. Who knew? *E ciao!*

The lunch was a really capital repast (Madame Rupin being a *gourmande* of the first order). And Cecca served it well, looking so handsome in her pink-and-white print gown, and the real rose-silk headkerchief that Dione had given her on her last *festa*, that Kent could scarcely keep his eyes from her.

"What a superb old woman," said he. "Quite the most beautiful old woman I have ever seen, I think."

Dione looked pleased, and her deep eyes grew liquid.

"As for me," said her mother, "I could never see the least beauty in old age. . . . To me it is the most horrible of all ideas, except the idea of death. *B-r-r-r*. . . ." And she shuddered, making the sign against evil out of sight among the folds of her gown.

"But Cecca *is* beautiful, mamma," insisted Dione. "Age does not take away her fine profile or her splendid eyes. . . ."

"Age," retorted her mother, "is loathsome in spite of a hundred fine noses and eyes. A man once said to me that all women over fifty ought to be killed . . . and he was perfectly right," she ended, bitterly.

Then she recalled suddenly the situation, and became once more all treacle-y smiles, and little facetiousnesses, and "Tesoros" and "Gioias." By the end of lunch Kent felt that he had had just about as much of Dione's mother as he could stand for the time being. The way that she quirked her little, moist, very white, black-rimmed fingers in handling knife and fork took off the edge of even his robust appetite.

It was with a deep lung-filling of relief that he found himself walking through the cool chestnut woods alone with Dione toward the Hermitage of the Trinità.

"You do indeed walk like an English girl, Signorina," he said, as she stepped in perfect time beside him, with her long, *fauve* gait. "Or, rather, you walk as fast and much more gracefully. Gigino told me about your walk. It quite bowled him over," he added, mischievously, with the Italian equivalent for "bowled him over."

"I did not know that I had walked with Signor Varoni," said the girl, unconcernedly. "A little stroll in the garden . . . that was not walking."

"At any rate," persisted Kent, "he was quite overcome."

"He is easily overcome, then," said Dione, still more indifferently.

An opening in the trees brought the Sasso di Ferro into full view.

"That is an extraordinary mountain," said Kent, gazing at it. "I suppose it cannot impress you, who have lived in sight of it all your life, as it does me."

Dione looked at it with him in silence for some moments. Then she glanced at his absorbed face.

"I call it Pan's Mountain," she said at last.

"'Pan's Mountain'!" he repeated. "It is its very name. Why did I not think of that, I wonder? . . ."

Then he looked down with a new interest at Dione. "You love the memory of the old dead gods?" he asked.

"They do not seem dead to me," she answered.

"No?" he said, more interested than ever.

"No," said Dione.

"You mean that you really . . ."

"I cannot talk about it," said the girl. "At least," she added, after a pause, "I cannot talk about it with most people."

"I am not 'most people,'" said Kent, whimsically. "With your permission, I am considered a poet . . . and that is the sort of thing they always understand."

"Why do you say 'considered'?" asked Dione. "Signor Varoni says that even our great poets say that you are a poet."

"Then," said Kent, trying to be as direct and unaffected as she was, "do you not think that you might talk about such things with a poet?"

Dione looked right up into his eyes, and he saw that her thick lashes made reflections in them exactly like grasses in still water.

"Perhaps," she said at last, "when I know you better."

"And when shall you know me well enough, do you think?"

"When I know the things you laugh at," said Dione. "No one ever knows another in the least until one knows the things they laugh at."

"That, Signorina, is a profound truth," said Kent.

"Yes, though I am only eighteen years old, I have found out that that is true," replied Dione.

They walked on in silence for a while, and then Kent said again:

"It is really amazing how well you walk. One is not used to seeing Italian women walk like that. I believe you could go on for fifteen or twenty kilometres without tiring. You do not walk in any respect like an Italian woman."

"It is, perhaps, that I do not wear corsets," said Dione.

Kent could not restrain a glance of astonishment. The slight, strong figure in its smoothly fitting gown of white linen, cut all in one, had seemed to him too absolutely finished and perfect not to be molded artificially at some point.

"No, I do not think it can be only that," was all that he said; and went on: "But as strong

and active as you are, do you only walk for exercise?"

"I can swim," said Dione . . . "well," she added after a second, "and I can play *boccie* . . . but mamma does not like me to."

"Can you really play *boccie* well, Signorina? . . . A woman's greatest talent is not for throwing things, you know."

"Yes, I know. My father explained to me why I can throw so well. It is because these bones"—she indicated her splendidly set clavicle—"with me are put in like a boy's."

"I see," said Kent, amused.

"If you do not quite believe me," said she, with perfect good-humor, "we can have a game at the Trinità, and then you can see for yourself."

"Capital!" exclaimed Kent. "But I do believe you. . . . Why do you doubt it?"

"It is a hard thing to believe that a girl can throw things well," returned Dione. "And you never saw me until two hours ago."

"Nevertheless," said Kent, seriously, "I should believe whatever you told me."

"Then," said Dione, as seriously, "you really know things as one knows when one is wet all over, as Cecca says. Because the one thing that I always do is to tell the truth. It makes mamma very displeased sometimes, and even Cecca thinks that I go too far. . . . But, tell me . . . do *you* think that one can go too far with the truth?"

"Ah," said Kent, "that is a very puzzling question. I would not dare to say 'No' or 'Yes' to it, just offhand, like that. You see, I can be truthful, too, for that was not at all the proper answer to make you."

"I prefer truth to properness very much," said Dione.

CHAPTER XIV

KENT worked like a monomaniac for two weeks with the rapidity and ease of a machine descending with a god. The monotony of these days would have been appalling to any save the creative temper. With the regularity of fine clockwork he rose at six, went Indian-trotting down to the lake for a swim before the domicile of Ping (with whom he had made great friends), trotted back, tingling and exultant, to breakfast on rye-bread and coffee at half-past eight, and at half-past nine was in the thick of the enchanted jungle of poetry—slashing away creepers of simile too clogging, snatching at strange word-orchids, swimming bright, dangerous rivers of invention, tracking the painted beasts of fancy to their breeding-places—alive, out of the flesh, playing with language like a child with a sword of flame—unenvious of any god in the awareness of his own godhead.

Thus for three or four hours. Then would come the reaction. How many fools had thought themselves Homers? Had he not a whole shelf of self-published megalomaniacs who had sent

him their effusions as the unappreciated first-fruits of the age? Was not one of these a complete *History of the United States* in very blank verse and a thick quarto volume, which opened with a scene between the archangels Michael and Raphael in Westminster Abbey? And did not its writer think it more sublime than *Paradise Lost?*

Then, in a soggy and darkling mood, he would partake of *polenta* and milk on the little green table in the balcony (for he never drank wine when he was writing), shake his fist at the imperturbable Sasso di Ferro as at one from whom came baneful influences, and, after a short *siesta*, flat on his back on the tiled floor with his pet pipe, would spring up as reinvigorated as Antæus after contact with the earth, and reading snatches of the morning's work, would cry, "Yes . . . it's good . . . it's good."

After that came an afternoon of revision and the jotting down of thick-swarming thoughts. Then another trot-down and swim, and back again in time for dinner.

With this meal he had a deep quaff of the good wine of Solcio, then went down-stairs to chat with the Sciora Laura and Pedring, or to take a hand at *scopa* or *briscola* with the latter, until ten o'clock, at which hour he dragged his mattress out upon the little balcony and went to sleep in the clean, fragrant air with the constellations wheeling majestically above him.

This, to her, mad whim of his for sleeping out in the open, with not even a sheet between him and the malevolent air of night, scandalized and distressed the Sciora Laura to a painful degree. In vain Kent assured her that he draped the balcony with his travelling-rugs so that no air-shy neighbor could be horrified. It was not that. No, truly. It was that he would surely get a "stroke of cold," and this stroke might fall upon his liver or his spleen, or even upon his heart, God alone could tell . . . and he might be very ill, or even die. . . . And then his lady mother's grief would be upon her, Laura, like a dark curse. She implored, she argued, she almost threatened. And when she found that all was vain she actually made a little pilgrimage to a distant chapel and asked the Virgin's special protection for a crazy son who was far from the mother who might have controlled him.

At the end of these two weeks Kent felt a sudden, overwhelming thirst for the companionship of his own kind and degree. Varoni had been in London for some time on business for his father, who was a Milan banker. There were only the Rupins left.

"The very thing," said he, as this thought came to him. "I'll let up for a day, and go and ask that queer, interesting girl to come and have a game of *boccie* at the Trinità."

And he smiled with sheer pleasure in the un-

usual and beautiful, as he recalled the backward swing of her tall, springy figure, with one of the big, wooden balls poised in her lifted hand.

All the time that he was dressing for this expedition he whistled so gayly and so masterfully in two keys, that Laura told her son: "One would think two blackbirds singing together in the house."

He arrived at Vareggio just as they were finishing breakfast. Would the Signora Rupin be so very gracious as to allow her daughter to walk to the Trinità with him, and there partake of lunch? "It is an English custom," he added, cutely; but he said nothing of the game of *boccie*, remembering Dione's mention of her "mamma's" prejudice.

The Signora Rupin, who had almost given him up as a probable suitor for her child's hand, and who had caused Cecca and Dione some trying moments on that account, agreed to this suggestion with unveiled delight.

She even proposed that Cecca should put them up an elaborate lunch which they might carry in her own little two-handled Venetian basket. But Dione said that one could get an excellent *frittata* and salad at the Trinità, and that she was sure that the Signor Kent would rather not carry a basket. Kent admitted that he preferred the idea of a *frittata* already on the spot, and with that and many *auguri* from the enthusiastic Signora Mamma, they set off.

Dione was already dressed for walking, as she had intended to take a long ramble in the hills by herself.

"The very thing for a game of *boccie*," declared Kent in high good-humor, looking at her short skirt of stiff, gray fustian, and her loose blouse of white silk that had been washed many times. She wore a little white linen peasant's hat, and carried a light staff of bamboo.

"It was sheer inspiration, my thought of asking you to come," continued he.

"Yes. I am very glad," said Dione. "It is a good day for a game. Not too hot, and overcast."

"It is a good day for anything," said Kent.

That last scene between Leonardo and the Lady Lisa made him feel that he had a right to the playthings of the gods.

They went without pausing through the garden and up the hillside and past the cascade, out upon the one street of Vareggio. Here the sight of some boys torturing two little *gire* (the thin-tailed squirrels of the lake) brought them to an angry halt.

Dione, too indignant to be wise, ordered the instant release of the *gire*. The boys merely grinned, and dragged the little creatures faster through the dust by the cords which they had fastened to their legs. Then Kent was for using force.

"No . . . no . . ." said Dione, "the whole village will be up if you mishandle the children. Let me speak some more."

And, turning, she poured forth a torrent of forceful dialect that gave the boys pause for a moment, and made them look foolishly, first at her and then at one another.

"Are they going to let them go? . . . What did you say to them?" asked Kent.

"I cursed them," said Dione, simply.

"You did *what?*"

"I said: 'If you do not let those *gire* go, may the Madonna see that you go to the Inferno as *gire* yourselves, and may stout devils with horns and forked tails tie you by the leg with cords of fire and drag your eyes out over hot cobble-stones!'"

"Lord love us!" breathed Kent, consumed with inward laughter. "They'll let them go, I should think."

But despite this thorough and original cursing, they had to produce some *soldi* and buy the *gire* before the imps would part with them.

As soon as the strings were handed them Dione lifted the worst injured little beast and cuddled it against her breast. Kent caught up the other, which promptly bit him through the fleshy part of his finger.

"Have care, Signorina!" called he, finger in mouth and the *gira* transferred gingerly to

his pocket. "These little animals bite like traps."

"Nothing ever bites me," said Dione. "I can handle any wild thing."

And she continued to cherish the little panting bunch of fur and fish-like bones.

They retraced their steps to the house, and Dione laid the *gire* upon some cotton-wool in the cage which had once held a blackbird that she had set free again, for the sight of a caged bird infuriated her almost as much as the sight of animals being tortured.

"Keep them carefully for me, Cecca *mia*," she said. "I will put them back in the forest with my own hands this evening if they are recovered enough."

Then she and Kent set out for the Trinità again, this time without further adventures.

CHAPTER XV

"I AM always glad when I see a sight like that that I am not a Christian," said Dione, as they passed once more through Vareggio on their way to the forest.

Kent thought her the most amazingly and delightfully unexpected being that he had ever known.

"And why?" asked he, taking this startling announcement as a matter of course.

"Because when one sees men or boys torturing some poor, helpless thing, and remonstrates with them, they always say, '*Hin minga Christian*' (They're not Christians), as if being a Christian gave one the right to every sort of devil's cruelty over those who are not."

"And you, yourself . . . with permission I should like to know the reason why you do not call yourself a Christian?"

"It is because of the beasts," said Dione.

"Because of the beasts?" said Kent.

"Yes. Christians, here in Italy at least, are most cruel to animals. I often think how it might have been if the Christ had said a great

saying for the poor beasts. 'Consider the lilies,' He said, but if He had said, 'Consider the beasts,' how much better that would have been. He said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the earth' . . . but suppose He had said, 'Blessed are the-kind-to-animals, for God will be kind to them'? . . . Think how different it would all have been! No poor *gire* with their eyes half dragged out, no poor horses beaten over the heads with great sticks when their loads are too heavy or struck with whips having nails in them, such as they use in Naples. . . . No, if the Christ had said that a Christian is one who is merciful to animals, all those cryings and groanings of helpless hurt beasts would never have sounded through Christian lands."

Her eyes were dark and hot, and her breast heaving. It was a rare thing for Dione to work herself into a passion, and she was really a rare thing to look upon when she did so. There was something about her, some inner glow, that was like a white sword-flame in a clear sheath.

Kent was beginning to think her remarkable as well as unusual.

"You make one reflect, Signorina," said he.

"I have reflected a great deal myself," replied she in her usual direct fashion. "I have been much alone, and when one is alone one has only one's thoughts."

"Most people have only those of others."

"Other people's thoughts do not interest me as my own do. I may have said a stupidity, but it is true."

"It is certainly far from being stupid. But tell me, if I am not indiscreet, do you never go to mass, as others do?"

"I go with my mother at certain times because I do not wish to give her unnecessary pain by seeming too peculiar in the eyes of others. But I have told her how I feel. It was my father's wish that I should believe only what came naturally to me."

"Your father must have been a very wise man."

"Yes, my father was both wise and good."

She hesitated a moment, then said:

"I think that you would have pleased him."

Kent felt himself flush with pleasure like a boy. He knew instinctively that a compliment coming from Dione was a most unusual thing.

"Thank you, Signorina," said he. "I should have felt it an honor to know him."

"And then," Dione continued, intoxicated by the singular delight of talking to some one who comprehended her, and speaking more in an hour than she had done in a whole week, "some of those stories in the Bible seem to me so very silly when they are not improper. That tale of Moses going up on a mountain and taking stone tablets on which God wrote with His finger.

Think of a God with fingers, Signore! Is it not to be like those black men with hair of wool who worship idols? Or like the Spanish sailors who beat the image of the Madonna if she doesn't send them fair weather when they pray for it? Truly, Signore, think of a God who said 'Let there be light' and there was light, using His fingers—*His finger* . . . Signore!—and tracing out words! Of course when one has had a father like mine, and thought long, long days and weeks and years all alone as I have, one cannot believe such clumsy inventions. But it occurred to me once," she continued, "when I was reading about it all in the Old Testament . . . my father gave me a Bible in French, you must know, as he wished me to look into these things for myself . . . it occurred to me that there might have been some sort of foundation for that story, since, of course, Moses must have cut the letters in the stone himself. And as I could not find out the real account in the Bible, I began making one in my own head. It was very amusing."

"There is nothing more amusing, truly, than making things in one's own head," said Kent, afraid of saying more, lest he should stop the flow of her confidence.

"Yes. . . . Is it not so? . . . Well, this history that I made up was about a poor woman of the strangers, who had been married by an Israelite, and whom Moses had caused to be put

away. She naturally disliked Moses . . . do you understand?"

"Entirely," said Kent. "She naturally would."

"And, besides, she believed in her own gods, and not in this irascible Jehovah whom he was always talking of. And she also thought that Moses occasionally told untruths. Moreover, she knew of his killing that man and hiding him in the sand, so she did not think that God could really have chosen Moses for His intimate friend, as Moses himself was always saying. No, this she did not believe for a moment. So, in my thought, I made this woman, very strong in the revenge of her heart, creep after Moses all the way up that rocky mountain of Sinai, and though her poor feet bled . . . for she had been cast out from the people, you know, and was very poor, and so had no shoes and scarcely any clothing . . . though her feet were bleeding and all her bones aching as with malaria, she had a great, dark joy within that kept her up and enabled her to reach the mountain-top. And when she was there she hid herself behind a rock and saw, with her own eyes, Moses himself cutting the words in the stone tablets."

"Well?" said Kent.

"Well . . . then she followed him down again, very cunningly, so that he never knew that she was there. And when all the people were assembled she sprang up before them and lifted her

arms in the air, and cried out with a great cry: 'People! Your prophet lies to you . . . God has not written on these stones either with finger or with pen, but Moses himself has cut out the letters with a chisel, for with these eyes I beheld him!'"

So lost was Dione in her invention that she paused, and, tossing up her arms, uttered the speech of the stranger woman with tragic intensity.

"And then?" asked Kent, after waiting a moment.

"And then the people stoned her, and went on believing in Moses and the finger of God. It is always so."

"Yes," said Kent, thoughtfully, "it is always so."

The girl's mind began to fascinate him. He longed to draw her out more and more, yet did not know exactly how to do so. He felt like a man on whose shoulder a free bird of the air has alighted, afraid to speak, afraid to make a movement of any kind. But he need not have feared, for that divine elation of the soul confessing itself to the soul that comprehends still held Dione, and her thoughts, long pent, pressed for utterance like birds against a window-pane behind which is a light.

"Now, you understand, Signore," she said, as they walked on, "that I have no disbelief in a

great God above all gods. It is only that I feel that about that God men cannot know, so that the less they speak and say about Him the more truly do they worship Him. The gods that are near, that are made in our image—those are the gods of which men may speak and write."

"Ah," thought Kent, "the bird is coming into my hand. Now she will tell me what she would not tell the other day. She must have guessed the things at which I laugh and at which I do not laugh."

He was wisely silent, however, just giving her an understanding look, and Dione continued.

"My old nurse, Cecca, you must know, Signore, believes in witches and such things. I do not know whether witches exist or not, but I cannot laugh at her, for I believe in some things myself at which others would laugh."

She gave him a quick glance.

"Not I," said Kent. "I believe in those sorts of things myself."

"Yes?" said Dione. "That is well. I must have felt it, for I could not have talked with you as I have done had it been otherwise. About these things that I believe in . . . it is like this. None can prove to me that they are not true; but, then, neither can I prove to any that they are true."

"Exactly," said Kent.

It occurred to him, drolly, that his replies were

becoming very like the answers of the persons interrogated by Socrates in the dialogues of Plato.

"Precisely," said he, again.

"And sometimes," went on Dione, "I think that it must be with Cecca something as it is with me. Whether half asleep or wider awake than usual I do not know, . . . but there are times when I seem to hear and see things, and though they are not real, as you and I are real here in the sunlight, walking along these mountains to the Trinità, yet they are more real in some strange way— I say it badly," she broke off, looking up at him from under dissatisfied brows.

"No, you say it perfectly," returned Kent. "It is the creative mood that you are describing —the mood in which one makes beings of one's mind-stuff, and they are realer than all the flesh-and-blood beings in the world."

"Yes . . . yes," said Dione, breathlessly, and she smiled.

This smile made her so beautiful that Kent just stared at her, off his guard.

But she was not conscious that she was being stared at.

"Listen," she said. "I will tell you the kind of thing that I mean. . . . One night last winter . . . oh, it was very cold! . . . The snow came 'pat, pat' against my window like hands of little baby ghosts asking to come in. . . . The wind made noises like a great bird in my chimney.

. . . One could hear the trees crack with the cold outside. . . . And in my room it was cold, cold. . . . When I lighted a candle (for I could not sleep, I was so cold) I could see my own breath and the breath of Masciett coming out in little puffs like smoke, where he lay sleeping on his rug beside my bed. . . . So I got up and took shavings and pine-cones, and lighted a great fire. . . . I was crouching before this fire, and Masciett close to me, and whether I dozed, who shall say? . . . But all at once against my window came three taps, sharp and clear . . . the way that a great queen might rap, half angrily, if she were shut out in the cold. I went at once (or so I thought), for that calling was not to be disobeyed, and I threw wide my shutters. . . . And it was the Lady Diana and two noble white hounds who stood there at my window. And her great bow of silver shone across her shoulder. . . . And the arrows in her quiver were frozen together, and the quiver filled with snow.

"And she was frowning at first, but then she smiled, and reached me her hand, and I led her to the fire, and spread for her the white bearskin that belonged to my father, and that always lies upon my bed in winter. And I gave her some apples and honey which I had by me, . . . and to the dogs I gave warm milk, . . . and they lapped it up . . . and were very friendly. But Masciett went from them in terror, and hid far

under my bed. And his coat was bristling, . . . and he moaned in his throat all the time that they remained.

"And when she had eaten, the Lady Diana said: 'Maiden, I come to you because when you were but a little child and your father had been telling you my name and who I am, you poured me libation that evening of the milk in your little bowl of silver, and you said, "Hail, Diana!" And now, in this land where I was once so mighty, and on all this dark earth, there is none who keeps faith in me but only you alone—and to you alone have I appeared, and to you alone have I made myself known. Unto no Christian could I appear or be made known, for they are a strange people, and have set up a strange Virgin in my stead. And in all my fair hunting-places and on the sides of all my mountains have they built shrines to this strange Virgin, who has yet borne a child and nurses it always against her breast. And her they worship with weeping and wailing, but me they worshipped with laughter and dancing. Yet I am Diana, and a Virgin, indeed, who have no worshippers any more forever, but no child!' . . . These words, or some such words as these, she spoke to me, and then bent and kissed me upon the forehead. And with the cold of that kiss I lost myself entirely. And when I next knew anything the white dawn was come, and Masciett licking my cheek, . . . and there on the

hearth was the empty bowl in which I had poured the warm milk."

They had reached the Trinità while Dione was speaking, and had seated themselves side by side on the stone parapet of the terrace before the church, overlooking the lake. The green tent of the old pollard linden-trees rustled above them, and the light *tramontana* lifted the wreath of Dione's black flamelets of hair into a sort of airy diadem. She had tossed her hat upon the ground in the earnestness of her talk, and Kent stooped and placed it upon the wall beside her as she finished.

"Signorina," said he, "is it possible that I shall be telling you news when I tell you that you, yourself, are a poet?"

"Who? . . . I? . . ." said Dione, and she looked scared.

"Yes, you, Signorina. Have you never tried to set down things in writing? Is it really possible that you have never tried that?"

"Oh no . . . no . . . no," said Dione. "I could not do it. . . . I do not wish to. . . . You are entirely mistaken. . . . I just live these things. The instant that I should try to write them they would vanish . . . I assure you, I assure you."

"Very well. . . . You must know best, of course," agreed Kent, fearful of startling her too much. "But, with permission, I shall make a few notes of your story of Diana, and then try

to put it into my very imperfect Italian for you, so that you may see for yourself whether it is a poem or not."

And he took a small, worn note-book out of his pocket, and drew from it a pencil.

This was the first time that Dione saw the little, teeth-marked, silver pencil that was to become so familiar to her.

He scribbled earnestly for a time, and she watched him, half fascinated, half ashamed.

"There," he said at last, pocketing book and pencil again. "And now shall we order our *frittata* and salad? You look . . . is it polite to tell a young Italian lady that she looks hungry?"

"I am very hungry indeed," said Dione.

They had a truly idyllic meal together at one of the stone tables in front of the *osteria*, with the lindens sending little disks of sunlight to float over their pretty food, and the weather-faded frescos of the Stations of the Cross glowing upon them from the arcade to the right. "It takes two poets to get up a god-like hunger," said Kent. "There was an English poet once named Shelley, and he would eat bowl after bowl of your *pan cot*, that heavenly good soup made of stale bread and water and butter and . . . I must say that for me, the last touch is some onions."

"I like onions in it, too," said Dione, gravely.

Then they strolled about awhile, and afterward had a royal game of *boccie*, which Dione won.

"You look like Atalanta, running to see where you have placed your ball and how far you've sent mine off."

"Atalanta ran after golden apples, not wooden balls," said Dione, gayly.

"Well, balls are golden when one throws them like that," retorted he.

It was nearly four o'clock when they started back to Vareggio.

As they came out on the mountain-top among the heather and the slight, nymph-like birches, Dione looked up at the sky, half covered now by little, round, white clouds, set close together like new-baked loaves of bread on a blue platter.

> "'Quand'i Nivul fan' pan',
> O pieuv incoeu, o pieuv diman','"

sang she in dialect.

"And what may that mean?" asked Kent.

"'When the clouds make bread, or are like loaves of bread, it will rain to-day or to-morrow,'" she translated.

"Then I was just in the nick of time with our beautiful day," said Kent.

"Yes," said Dione, "it has truly been a beautiful day."

CHAPTER XVI

THOUGHT Kent that evening, after he had read over the fortnight's work in order to put himself in a fitting mood for the morrow, and sat smoking a meditative pipe on his balcony:

"It is a fortunate thing for me that Dione is only the potential mother of Aphrodite and not Aphrodite herself. It is a very fortunate thing, indeed, that that striking and original young woman doesn't appeal to me in any of the more obvious human fashions. She has a mind, though, and an imagination. . . . And she is of the heroically unsentimental type. . . . I wonder," he broke off, addressing the Sasso di Ferro, "what there is about her that reminds me of you, my darkling friend? Something fateful and impending, as if it would not be a good thing to take little, jocose liberties with either of you? 'The gods that are made in our image,' she said. . . . Yes . . . that young person could be quite as ruthless as your genuine goddess on occasion, I venture to surmise. . . . It's in her brows and the whole look of her. . . . Rather an over-

whelming being to fall in love with. . . . A sort of cross between Medea and her own Diana. . . . Thank the Lord, my lady Lisa, you own me, body and soul, for the present. . . . I haven't so much as a flicker to give any one else."

For he was, indeed, wholly enamoured of *La Gioconda*, as he always was of his last creation in woman.

"The mother, though . . ." he mused on. "There's a nasty little person with a nasty little mind. . . . And scheming!" . . . He whistled. "She's laying her net for me and Gigino with all the persistence, if not the skill, of the fishermen of Isola Pescatori. . . . What a little paste of low thoughts and aims! . . . She's like maccaroni that's been hung to dry where things aren't clean. It's extraordinary how that woman annoys me. . . . When one looks at that clean, clear girl, and reflects who gave her birth, one rather believes in reincarnation and 'sich.' . . . Yes, rather. . . . She's like the famous lily on the dunghill, . . . for that mother of hers swims in sensuality, . . . breathes it in, . . . gives it out; laps it up out of any puddle, I'll wager. . . . There goes that plump, blue-jowled priest for his evening rubber of *briscola* with her now. . . . Her *moros*, probably, as the village says. It's a stark shame that the girl should have to live in that crawling atmosphere. There's Gigino now, . . . really one of the best chaps I know. . . . And he's quite

silly about her already. . . . If she were to marr
him, that would be a good solution."

Then he laughed, emptying his pipe over th
railing, and looking at the Sasso di Ferro.

"Somehow," said he, "I should as soon thin
of *your* marrying Gigino. But I wonder wha
she will do in the end? It isn't easy to forese
the fate of a misplaced creature like that."

That night, when he fell asleep, he dreamed tha
Dione was playing *boccie* along the alley of moon
light with the Sasso di Ferro, which, as she spe
the swift gold balls, opened huge jaws of ston
and snapped them up.

In the mean time the blue-jowled priest ha
taken a turning to the left, out of Kent's line o
vision, and was on his way to Ghiffa, and th
partner of Madame Rupin in her evening gam
was none other than Cecca.

Cecca was healthily sleepy after a long day'
work, for she kept the House of the Weasel as
cat its fur, and this added to her Sciora's ill-humor
she being already very cross, because his priestl
duties had called her plump friend to Ghiffa.

"*Oca!* . . . Owl! . . ." cried she, when, fo
the fourth time, Cecca, with closed eyes, ha
bowed politely to a lead without producing he
own card. "Am I to sit here and have my ow
servant snore in my face? . . . Wake up thi
instant! You do nothing but sleep, as thoug
you were already in your dotage . . ."

"*Speriamo bene* . . . let us hope for the best," said Cecca, philosophically, and took the lead with the ace of diamonds, which happened to be *briscola*, or trumps, on this occasion. Now it was early in the hand, and this was really a stupid thing for Cecca to do.

"You seem to enjoy giving me your *centesimi*," remarked her mistress, sourly.

"*Ciao!*" said Cecca. "It's all in the day's work."

"You're an *oca* . . . a goose," said her mistress again, which in Italian is insulting.

"Two geese go well together," remarked Cecca, imperturbably.

With this she caught the ace of spades and the three of hearts in succession—an excellent play. "Hold your impertinent tongue or I'll throw it at you," said Madame Rupin, angrily.

"Two can play at that game also," replied Cecca. Then for the fifth time her broad lids closed, her gay headkerchief drooped forward, and she saluted her mistress's lead with a stately bow and snore.

Madame Rupin caught up the cards in both hands and flung them in her face.

"*Per bacco!*" cried Cecca, springing to her feet. "I've a mind to slap your hands for you as when you were little. . . . I am not a beast of the field for you to abuse. I am a Christian."

"Act like one, then," said the lady, sullenly, but rather sobered.

"It is an hour that all Christians should be in their beds, and I shall act like one by going to mine," retorted Cecca, and she went toward the door.

But this Madame Rupin could not endure. She was wide awake, she was very fretful, and she could never remain alone for three minutes together, especially at night.

"*Na, na*, Cecca *mia*," coaxed she, going after her. "Can't you see I'm just like a poor, cross baby? . . . I mean no harm. . . . There's the bit of real lace for neck and sleeves that my friend the Signora Bossi sent me from Venice . . . take that on your way to bed, and think no more about it."

"A fine sight I should be with lace to my gullet and paws," growled Cecca, still wrathful. "That is an ugly custom that you have had ever since you were a child—to do one an injury, and then offer some bit of trash for a salve."

"Here, then," said her Sciora, with a really heroic effort, for she was a genuine miser and as cunning as a magpie about it, "here is a whole franc. Get with it whatever you like, and be pleasant again."

"*Mph!*" was Cecca's only remark. Indeed, Madame Rupin had been known to put a ten-centime piece in a beggar's bowl and take out a five-centime one. It was the second time in her life that her mistress had given her money, and Cecca took the coin and pocketed it.

"It will do to get the *tousetta* some fal-lal," thought she.

Dione certainly had not many "fal-lals," and when Cecca went over her wardrobe every week to brush and darn, her only consolation for its meagreness was the fact that her Scior had tied up the girl's modest *dot* before he died so that his wife could not touch it.

"Very well," she then said, coming back into the room. "But I wish to make it clear that I will not play another game with those cards that you flung in my face."

"Surely, surely," said her mistress, with unusual meekness. "We will get out the *tarot* cards instead, and you shall tell my fortune."

"Yes, it is a Friday, and that is a sure day for them," said Cecca, interested at once in anything occult.

Madame Rupin took a rather grimy pack of the old fortune-telling cards from the table drawer and handed them to Cecca, who shuffled them elaborately and made her mistress cut them three times.

"Eh," said she, regarding the first cut, "*parole piccanti* (sharp words). It seems to me that those have come to pass already. And what is this? A letter? . . . *Ciao!* . . . and a small sum of money . . . that will probably come in the letter."

Madame Rupin's bright eyes of a *ouisteetee* became brighter.

"They are good cuts, eh, *cara?*" said she.

"*Pazienza* . . . let us wait for the others before we say that," replied Cecca.

She "laid" them peasant fash on.

"What is in your arms," said she, as she put them down. "What is under your feet, what is coming to you, and what is running after you," and she continued thus until all the cards were on the table in little separate piles. Then lifting them, she scrutinized each packet closely.

"What is in your arms," said she, "is a little money, perhaps an illness or a journey, and a priest."

Madame Rupin darted a sharp, sideward glance. Cecca's face was expressionless. She laid down the cards, however, face up, so that her mistress could see that the card for "priest" was really among them.

"What is coming is a dark man and a fair man, and some displeasure."

"*Aï, aï!*" exclaimed Madame Rupin. "It is the Varoning and the Englishman. . . . Perhaps they are going to quarrel over Dione."

"Perhaps. These other cards are insignificant. Some woman is jealous of you." The Sciora simpered. "And there is a message about a relative."

"Perhaps my cousin Peppino is going to die and leave me something."

"It will be his nightcap, then," said Cecca, "for the priests have got all the rest while he is alive. What is running after you is a marriage." (Madame Rupin nodded vigorously.) "Some *fastidi* (bothers) and three lovers." (Madame Rupin shrugged.) "Under your feet is *chiacchere* (gossip), a dark man, and a present."

"*Minga mal*" (Not bad), said the lady. "Now do them for Dione."

Cecca did them for Dione, but they did not come out very satisfactorily.

"Even the cards won't go right for that girl!" cried her mother, peevishly, mixing them all up as they lay spread on the table. "*Madonna mia!* Why couldn't she have been a boy? . . . There is Clelia Morelli with a fine son who is the joy of her heart, and he only eighteen and has his *ballerina* like any other man about town, and earns money which he shares with his mamma . . . while I have only this great, gawky girl who turns up her nose at a rich Scior like the Varoning. . . . God help her if the Englishman don't take her!"

"You speak because you have a mouth, and not because there is any reason in your words at all," said Cecca, indignantly. "That Englishman or any other man may thank the Virgin on his two knees if such a fine girl as your daughter deigns to look at him. You do not deserve to have such a daughter, and some day God will

punish you properly for speaking and feeling as you do about her!"

"You are always taking my words crossways," protested her mistress. "Shouldn't a mother be anxious to see her daughter well married? And shouldn't she be vexed when her daughter won't go to a single ball or party, or anywhere that she might meet eligible young men, and then when two come dropping out of the clouds, as it were, right on her nose, she turns it up at them?"

"You should be more exact," said Cecca. "It does not seem to me that she turns up her nose at the Englishman."

"Does it not? Does it not? . . . You think that she likes him, *cara mia?* . . . You know her so much better than I do."

"And that's a nice thing for a mother to say, but the Madonna knows that, this time, you are exact."

"But do you? Do you?"

"They certainly appear to me to get on quite well together," admitted Cecca, grudgingly.

"Oh, if it would only come to pass!" cried the other, clasping her small hands. "He is rich, and a great Scior in his own country, you must know, Cecca."

"And is that all you ask for in the husband of your only child?" said Cecca. "Besides, you are strangely willing to believe hearsay, it seems

to me, when it comes to choosing this husband."

"Cecca! Cecca!" cried Madame Rupin, seizing her arm. "Let me implore you . . . encourage it! . . . encourage it! . . . Don't put any notions in her head more than she has there already. The Varonis are great Sciori in Milan, and what they have told me about him you may believe. Do not do anything to interfere, for the love of God. Promise me."

"I shall do nothing against the child's happiness, you may be sure," said Cecca, tartly. "It would be better that you should do something for it while she is with you. Never have I seen a peasant woman so anxious to fling her child into the arms of the first man who comes along as you are. I believe that peasants are better mothers than Sciori, anyway. And the Virgin hears me."

With this she put back the *tarot* cards in the drawer, shut it with a bang, lit two candles, and bore her mistress protesting off to the bed, beside which she had to sit nodding until that exacting lady fell asleep.

All this time Dione, at her open window in her nightgown, had been gazing at Pan's Mountain, and living over what was certainly the most remarkable day of her life.

She had spoken as she had never been able to speak before, even to Cecca, and some one had

listened as sympathetically as even Cecca did and with far more comprehension. Yes . . . and he had called her a poet . . . a poet had called her a poet. It was not so, of course . . . he was mistaken . . . her fancies were not poems, but all the same it was delightful to think that he had called her so. And she liked him. She was quite sure that she liked him now. Ever since it had occurred to her that her father would have liked him she had been quite sure of her own feeling toward him. . . . Was he the mate that Pan had sent her? . . . Was he? Was he? . . .

Love had never touched the girl, though she guessed right well what love might be, and she was certainly not in love with this Englishman who looked so glad to be alive and laughed so joyously. But she might be . . . yes, that was very possible. . . . And how strong he was and tall. A man . . . yes, a man. If she were to dance with him she could not look down upon the top of his head, that was certain. Yes . . . she was tall and dark, and he was tall and fair. "If we were to love each other and to marry we would have splendid sons," reflected Dione, the candid. Then she said, "*Evoë* Pan!" to the Sasso di Ferro, and went also to her bed.

CHAPTER XVII

KENT called two or three times on the Rupins during the next fortnight, but he went late in the afternoon when his work was over, and he did not see Dione except casually in the presence of other visitors, until the second Friday following the day of their walk to the Trinità.

On this afternoon he went down toward five o'clock for his usual swim in the lake, and when he reached the Osteria del Pesce d'Oro, there was Dione on the beach in a much-worn, white serge bathing-dress, with Cecca keeping guard.

Then Kent was exceedingly glad that he had brought his own bathing-suit with him, though he had left it with Ping's relative in the *osteria* after the first day, and adopted the little striped breeks usually worn on the lake. He scurried into this neglected costume now, and ran down to the shore.

"What luck, Signorina!" called he. "We shall have a famous swim together if you really swim as well as you play *boccie*."

Cecca, who was standing close to Dione, holding her young Sciora's cloak over one shoulder

and knitting on a massive green stocking, gave him a piercing glance. She seemed reassured by what she saw, for to herself she said, "*Ciao!* The Virgin prosper it," and went on with her knitting.

"I can swim better than I can play *boccie*," said Dione to Kent, "and I am only waiting for Ping to bring me a pair of new cord-sandals from Ghiffa, because the sole has worn off from one of mine, and it is not possible to walk on this beach in bare feet."

"No, truly," said Kent. "I tried it the first day and cut my foot quite a bit."

He liked her careless pose as she sat with her feet stretched out in front of her on a tuft of grass. She wore no stockings, and her young Dian's legs shone firm and polished from the knee down. Kent smiled, recalling the lines of buxom old Herrick, in which he praises his "Julia's legge" for being "as white and hairlesse as an egge." What a gorgeous young pagan she was, to be sure!—as unselfconscious, as clean-cut, as fearless.

Here Cecca said:

"Will you please, Sciora Dione, to look at that sky?"

She pointed with her needles, and both turned and looked at the sky toward Laveno. It was darkening ominously under a great hood of cloud.

"It looks as though there might be a *temporale* (thunder-storm) later," said Dione.

"Not much later," said Cecca. "'Soon,' is the word for what is coming, in my opinion. You had better think twice before you go for that swim of yours."

"Oh, to swim in the beginning of a *temporale!* . . . I should love that," said Dione.

"Yes, you have a gift of loving what is not best for you," grumbled her nurse.

"By Jove! . . . I should like that, too," exclaimed Kent. "How fast it's coming!"

Here Ping arrived breathless, the new sandals extended before him.

"Your shoes, Sciora Dione," panted he; "but only look what a big fellow is coming yonder. . . . You won't take your swim in the teeth of that boy."

"Give me the shoes, please," said Dione. "Yes, I am going to swim before the storm breaks, and this Signore is coming with me."

"*Hin mat!*" (They're crazy!) cried Ping, turning helplessly to Cecca.

"If you want her to do a thing, just urge her not to," replied she. "But when the teeth are shut the tongue keeps warm, so I say no more."

The *inverna*, already strong, was increasing every moment. The mountains took on a sullen blue and the water a livid olive color.

Dione had slipped on the new shoes, and, now standing up, began to walk toward the lake. Her head was wound about three times by a snood of

black ribbon, leaving free only a few short locks to lift and fringe out in the wind. She waded in for a few yards, then threw herself forward as upon a lover's breast. Kent went in beside her, and they began to swim, stroke for stroke, toward the coming storm.

They heard the dull artillery of thunder far off toward Milan, then nearer; then came a lurid flicker over all the southeastern sky, as though a valkyr's stallion had flickered his gold hide. There was a nearer flash, more lancelike now. The air fiends were using spears. As they clove on through the heaping waves, now in the trough, now buoyant on a crest, the dark Stone of Iron seemed to swell, to tower, to topple toward them.

"Are you afraid of the lightning?" asked Kent. "Shall we turn back?"

"I like what frightens," answered she, "but I am never afraid of lightning."

They had to shout to make themselves heard above the thunder and the wind that snatched the words from their lips.

And now the Storm Witch came at a bound, with skirts spread in either hand. She howled, and shook out her hair, and the sky was darkened to the zenith. Above Laveno a flag of green glare unrolled. The lake quaked and quickened . . . showed its fangs. All the clouds, so long forming on the Lombard plain, pressed forward

together, a great clan, gathering to the drums of thunder and the trumpets of the wind.

"This is living!" said Kent, and Dione, in her heart, said, "*Evoë* Pan! . . . It is my mate! . . . It is my mate!"

Then all at once, with an unspeakable glare that blinded them for the moment, Pan's Mountain seemed to split from crown to base, and spat forth a stream of liquid fire.

Immediately after, a vague sound of shouting reached them. He looked round and saw Cecca waving frantic arms at the edge of the water.

"Your old nurse is frightened . . . Shall we go back?" he said.

Dione turned at once, and, urged by the fierce waves, they won easily to shore.

Masciett, who had been scouting along the beach, uttering his high-pitched, throaty wolf-cry of anxiety from time to time, sprang into the lake and swam some yards to meet them.

He leaped upon Dione, licking her wet hands, fondling them with open jaws and delicate pressure of teeth, as though he had thought never to see her again.

Cecca, scolding, cast the long cloak about her, and all three, with the dog still leaping in ecstasy, hurried into the *osteria*.

And now the cloud burst, and the rain came with the wild violence of an angry woman's tears. The windows thrummed, the waves were shat-

tered. They were shut as in a streaming sphere of gray crystal. Mountains, shore, the near trees —all disappeared as by a wand-wave.

"*Zia*," said Ping to his old aunt, with a lordly gesture, after Dione and Kent had changed their bathing-suits and descended again, "bring wine and cake . . . these Sciori need refreshment after such a bath as that."

All drank some of the rough, acrid red wine that Ping persisted in calling "Chianti," but they would have no cakes, and a very little of the wine sufficed.

"*Ancora, ancora*," urged Ping. "Water for the skin perhaps, but wine for the vitals. Eh! The Sciori are like our saying about *risotto* . . . 'It flourished in water, it must be drowned in wine.' . . . I pray you, drink . . . drink . . ."

And when they refused with many "*Grazies*," he undertook the task for them.

"*Alla sua salute*," said he, pompously, and proceeded to gulp glass after glass, chattering in between. As he had already imbibed freely of beer in Ghiffa with a friend, these potations soon had their effect.

The poor *zia* looked anxious, and conferred in low tones with Cecca, who said, "*Ma!*" and "*Bestia!*" (Beast) at gruff intervals, and often opened the door to see whether the storm was abating so that they could make their escape.

"*Aia!*" gushed Ping. "'Tis well that you

should shelter even in my poor inn during such a storm as this. Sixty trees did I see go down at the Villa Ada in just such a *buff* within eight minutes. *Crrrk! Paf!* There they were lying on the ground like a man with a pain in his belly . . . and they were not common trees . . . but, Sciori, as one might say . . . brought from all parts of the world. . . . Christofen! that was a sight. . . ."

"Does he annoy you?" said Kent, aside to Dione.

"No, he is only a little tipsy. Let him talk."

"*Aia! Aia!*" continued the Ping, "to think of a young Sciora and a *forestiero* going to swim in the teeth of a storm like this! One would say that they were saved for something . . . for each other, perhaps . . . excuse my little jest . . . one gets jolly in a storm like this. *Zzt!* It goes through one's blood like the lightning through the air. . . . Drink, Sciora . . . drink, Scior, I pray you. Drink with me to your own health and a fine wedding!"

"*Bestia!*" said Cecca in his ear, with the angry whisper of a bee that has blundered into an empty jug, "you're *ciuch* (drunk). If you don't shut up, I'm a strong woman, and I'll lug you off and put you to bed . . ."

"She says I'm *ciuch*," announced Ping, with a rapturous smile. "Now hear the truth . . . all

people who call others drunk are always drunk themselves . . ."

What Cecca would have replied to this will never be known, for here the door opened, and Varoni, who had only that day returned from England, came into the room. He looked pale, and his kindly eyes were anxious. He carried two umbrellas, and over his arm was a soggy mass of shawls.

"*Per bacco*, Gigino!" said Kent. "Did you swim here?"

"Very nearly," replied his friend, smiling with relief as he caught sight of Dione. "*Come, stai, caro?* . . . I am delighted to see you here under shelter, Signorina. Your Signora Mamma was very alarmed. She thought that you might even be in the lake."

"I have been in the lake," said Dione, "but I would naturally come out again in such a storm. . . . You are most kind, Signore, to come to see about me. Is it possible that *la mamma* sent you out in such weather? I am very, very sorry."

Dione knew exactly how anxious Madame Rupin had been, and why she had sent poor Varoni down the mountain-side in a *temporale*, and she knew, moreover, that Kent also knew. She felt such a dumb rage against her mother as shook her inwardly.

"Eh, *la Peppa!*" cried Ping, before Varoni could do more than begin his protestations.

"Here are two goldfish in the Pesce d'Oro for the first time! Dip in your pretty net, Sciora Dione! If one escapes you'll get t'other!"

"Ping," said Dione, calmly, "you are very drunk, indeed. You will go away at once."

"I go," said Ping, weaving a devious way to the door of an inner room, "but do not forget to take my advice, Sciora. Dip in your net! . . . Dip in your net!"

Kent had a real heart-leap of admiration at the girl's manner. He thought that she behaved as a young queen might whose chamberlain had suddenly gone daft and struck her in the presence of ambassadors.

She, in the mean time, was looking quietly out of the window. "I think," she now said, turning round, "that we shall be able to start in a few moments. These sudden storms on the lake often go as quickly as they come."

And indeed within fifteen minutes they were able to return to Vareggio.

They managed to survive the nauseously sweet gratitude of Madame Rupin for the restoration of her "Only joy," her "Only treasure," and Varoni returned with Kent to his lodgings in Ceredo.

CHAPTER XVIII

"LORD! What a creature to have mothered that girl!" exclaimed Kent, as they tramped off together. "I can't get over it."

"Yes, is it not so, *caro mio?*" asked Varoni, eagerly. "But the father must have been a remarkable man. . . . Of the Servian nobility, perhaps. . . . For she is like a young empress, is she not?"

"Like a whole bunch of them, with an abbess or two thrown in . . . for I don't think I ever saw any one before that I thought capable of quelling a convent of obstreperous nuns. I should think that she's about equal to any situation in which she might find herself. . . . Did you ever see anything so perfect as her behavior when that little oaf began his coarse jests? . . . By Jove! That girl's got a destiny, I should think, though I can't for the life of me guess what it may be."

"It would be very easy to guess if I could have my part in it," said Varoni, simply.

"Eh, Gigino! . . . You *are* gone this time, aren't you?" said Kent, hooking a boyish arm

in his friend's and smiling down at him. "Up to the eyes . . . over the brain . . . eh, Gigino *mio?*"

"If you mean that I am deeply and seriously in love," said Varoni, soberly, "it is true."

"Do you mean to say that you'd have no hesitation about marrying a girl with a mother like that?"

"I mean," said Varoni, unlinking his arm from Kent's, and standing still in the road the better to look into his eyes—"I mean that I would marry the Signorina Rupin, no matter how objectionable her relatives might be."

"You're a brick, Gigino!" said his friend, warmly.

"Whether I am a brick or not, that is the way I feel," returned Varoni.

"Eh, Lord! . . . But you're cocksure," said Kent, with a sigh, as they walked on.

"It seems to me that in such a case, to be 'cocksure,' as you call it, is the only way," replied Varoni.

"You remind me of the chap in *Hudibras*," said Kent, laughing. "'No dread could cool his courage from vent'ring on that dragon marriage.' . . . And even if you should live happy ever after the mother would be plenty of dragon."

"There are means," said Varoni, seriously, "by which the mother could be suppressed. It does not seem to me that the Signorina Rupin idolizes her mother."

"No," admitted Kent, "I shouldn't call it idolatry. She wouldn't be the girl she is if she didn't see through that flimsy little doll."

"And yet," said Varoni, "she treats her with perfect respect."

"Of course. We've agreed that she is a remarkable and distinguished personality. Well . . ." He sighed again and gave a long stretch, clasping his hands above his head and straining it backward—he never wore head-gear of any sort in these mountains. "Well, . . . all my *auguri*, but I must say you're tackling a big job, in my humble opinion."

"You mean the mother?"

"I mean both, my dear. The mother . . . *Ciao!* as you say here. I suppose that you and your own lady mother could squash her into bearableness between you . . . but the daughter. . . . Why, my child, she'd rule you with a rod of iron."

"I'd kiss the rod, then," said Varoni, smiling.

"Gad! . . . I believe you would, . . . and enjoy it, too. You'd probably even make it blossom, iron or no iron, in the temperature of such a love as yours. But would it be good for her? You've got to think of the effect upon her, you know," Kent wound up, mischievously. "She's very young, and, though it's hard to believe, I suppose her character isn't formed yet."

"I do not think," said Varoni, "that anything could injure her character."

"*Carissimo mio*, to hear you, one would think that you had never been inoculated. A worse case I never saw."

"'Inoculated?'"

"Yes . . . with love, my dear. When one has had scarlatina, I believe that one cannot have scarlet-fever so terribly. But your fever is vermilion, crimson, magenta . . ."

"I suppose," said Varoni, "that a man in love seems always a little ridiculous to one who is out of love, even if that man happens to be his best friend."

"Now, Gigino, no huffiness. . . . Don't add the crowning symptom to your distemper by squabbling with me. I'm bound to talk in my own fashion or shut up. Besides, you know that a thing as big as this can't happen to you without affecting me earnestly. Aren't you used to the Anglo-Saxon in me yet?"

"I dare say," replied Varoni, rather wistfully, "that I have not a keen sense of humor."

"Hang humor!" said Kent. "I'll be as grave as Athene's owl from this on. Don't shut in on yourself, old chap; you'll nip my feelers in the process if you do. I've a whimsical way of thinking, as a rule, and with you I just think aloud, that's all. *Capisci?*"

"*Capisco*," said Varoni, and gave his friend an affectionate glance from his kindly black eyes.

They had reached Kent's lodgings by this time,

and, mounting the little stone staircase, ensconced themselves on the balcony, Kent with his usual pipe, Varoni with a long, black "Virginia," through which ran a straw. "That is the most ferocious weed for so mild a man," laughed Kent. "It makes me sneeze even through my pipe smoke. How you can get through it without convulsions of nature I can't see."

"It is perhaps because I am used to it," said Varoni.

Before many minutes they were back on the subject of Dione again.

"Alareec," said Varoni, suddenly, looking rather shy, "there is one reason why I have spoken so openly to you . . . even to the extent of boring you a little, I fear . . ."

"We've cut out that, you know," said Kent.

"Very well. But I must tell you this reason. It was . . . it is . . ."

He hesitated, then went on in a rush.

"How is it possible, I ask myself, that you have seen much of this young girl during the last month, and yet are not in love with her?"

"Gigino," said Kent, earnestly, "in your state of mind it would naturally seem impossible to you; nevertheless, let me assure you that it is a fact. I admire her with all my might—in truth, I can honestly say that I never admired any woman more, young or old; but as for being in love . . . my dear man, you are an Italian, and

you should know that it's the little things and not the big things that usually cause a man to 'fall in love,' as one says. . . . Venus might appear, a pearl of pearls in her sea-shell, and if she had not just that subtle, inexplicable something . . . that word 'sesame' to whisper in a man's ear, why . . . she might as well have lain *perdue* at the bottom of the ocean for all the power she would have over him. . . . Signorina Rupin is a splendid creature, but for me she hasn't that certain something I spoke of. I'm like a man," he ended, whimsical again, in spite of himself, "who has a figurative cold in his head, and so is unaffected by the perfume of even the Rose of the World."

Varoni took a sober whiff of his "Virginia," which required both art and practice to keep alight.

"I am exceedingly glad that this is so," said he, "because it has caused me some bad moments, thinking that we might be in love with the same woman."

"You blessèd old chap!" exclaimed Kent. "Think of that, now!"

"Yes, to me it would have been a real blow," said Varoni. "But now all is clear between us. I can go ahead with a free heart."

"Go ahead by all means, and the Virgin prosper you. But, if I may say so without being indiscreet, I'd go ahead a bit slowly. . . . '*Festina lente*,' as the old motto has it."

"Why?" asked Varoni.

"Well, do you know, that young lady doesn't seem the sort of person to 'hustle,'" replied Kent. "If I were in your place I'd make pretty sure that she cared, also, before I spoke."

"That is not so important with a young Italian girl," said Varoni. "They generally care afterward, not before."

Kent sprang up in real consternation, standing with his back against the railing, and gazing down into the other's face.

"Man . . . man . . ." said he, "do you tell me that you're going to stake your whole life's happiness on a throw with loaded dice? Gigino, upon my word I thought you had more gumption than that."

"What is 'gumption'?"

"'Gumption' is a sort of dialect for *savoir faire*, worldly wisdom, the common sense that comes from experience. But I could shake you for sitting there and looking at me so serenely with that preposterous notion in your head. Marry *that* girl, and expect love to come after! . . . Why, my dear, if she didn't love you and love you mighty hard to begin with, she'd hang you up over the bed in her girdle as Brunhild hung what's-his-name on their wedding-night. . . . Why, she's the sort to be wooed with sword and flame. . . . *Care!* If she doesn't love you beforehand! And you with your little, old-

wives' nonsense about love 'coming after.' 'Love comes after' only when it comes like Jill tumbling down-hill after Jack. You put me past all patience! . . . Just you try it, my dear, and when you're a frozen mass of vain tears, and sit trying to thaw out over the cool stove of conjugal affection, think of me and my 'wingèd words!'"

Varoni looked at him thoughtfully, and took another whiff of his "Virginia."

"You would know how to woo her," he said, at last.

"I?" said Kent, feeling foolish.

"Yes, Alareec, you. Be careful that she does not become more interested in you than you are in her."

"Man alive!" cried Kent, thoroughly irritated, "you talk as if I were some gaudy 'masher,' or girl-killing actor in the last tragedy. . . . I've just about as much cause to 'be careful' with the Signorina Rupin as . . ."

"You have," he was about to say, but broke off in time.

" . . . as the Pope has," he ended, lamely.

"'As I have,' you were going to say, were you not?" asked his friend, undisturbed. "That is very true where I am concerned. I have only seen the young lady twice, and I am not a romantic figure . . . whereas, you are certainly a very romantic figure, and have seen her constantly for a month."

"'A romantic figure!' . . . Oh, Lord!" groaned Kent.

"It is true," insisted Varoni. "A very romantic figure—good-looking, fair, a poet of renown, a . . ."

"Shut up," ordered Kent, exasperated, "or I'll drop you over the balcony, chair and all, right onto the Sciora Laura's verbena-bed! It takes you Latins in an analytical mood to make a chap feel an out-and-out ass. . . . Of all the forlorn nonsense . . ."

He went inside growling, and fetched a fresh pipe which he proceeded to light, still muttering in between puffs.

"There is no use showing temper, *caro mio*," said Varoni, with the gentle stolidity which often served him well. "Such things have to be considered, and I ask you to reflect how you would feel if so charming and unusual a girl became unhappy on your account?"

"Oh, damn!" said Kent; and then to temper the remark, added: "That's the sixth match I've spent on this beastly pipe."

"Yes, I ask you that," repeated Varoni, unmoved.

"And I ask you how you'd feel if I really did drop you onto those verbenas? . . . My fingers are itching for it."

"Well," said Varoni, resignedly, "if you won't answer, you won't. And since you are not in

love with her, I know that you will be careful with her for my sake."

"You know a precious lot," growled Kent—"enough to knock out the average *savant*, I should say."

And when Varoni said "*Prego?*" he replied, curtly:

"Nothing."

"Well, *ciao*," said Varoni, a few minutes later, "I feel much better for our little talk, and I must be returning to Pallanza or the mamma will grow anxious. Yes, I feel infinitely better since we have talked frankly together."

"You've the advantage of me, then," retorted Kent; but he mumbled so with the pipe in a corner of his mouth that Varoni said "*Prego?*" again.

"I say all right. Glad you feel so jolly," replied Kent.

"Not 'jolly' precisely," said Varoni, "but easier in my mind—more satisfied."

"May the Lord go on being good to you."

"Thank you, Alareeco *mio, e ciao!*"

"*Ciao!*" said Kent.

They had a good hand-clasp, and Varoni went away, leaving Kent to the company of his pipe and the Sasso di Ferro.

CHAPTER XIX

KENT soon finished his pipe, and stood with folded arms upon the balcony-rail, watching the triumphing Maggiore spread glory over the late battle-field of earth, and air, and water. Down from the Alps of Switzerland it came, straight from the north, and the sullen *mareng* fled before it, a thing in tatters. So clear was the yellow sky that it seemed a great jasper being purified in some blast-furnace of the upper gods. Against it the mountains stood out clear-cut and fresh, as though just created. The Sasso reared aloft its drenched, dark folds, a giant refreshed with the strong wine of tempest.

Yet Kent was not thinking of the beauty upon which he stared. He was musing upon the heart of man, that organ so deceitful and desperately wicked.

"Othello said 'goats and monkeys,'" thought he, in his usual, rather whimsical fashion. "I won't go as far as that, but I do say 'apes and peacocks.' . . . Yes, all of us . . . men and women and children, too. I won't let them off,

either. . . . The kingdom of heaven will have to be reconstructed if it is 'of such' as your modern kid. . . . Yes . . . in all of us . . . something of the ape . . . something of the peacock. . . . And where did I get that 'apes and peacocks,' by-the-way? . . . Oh yes! . . . I remember . . . 'And once in three years came the navy of Tharsish, bringing gold and silver, ivory and apes and peacocks.' . . . I asked a chap once who had written that, and he guessed Oscar Wilde. . . . It wasn't poor Wilde, though . . . it was just the historian of King Solomon in the first Book of Kings. . . . Yes, and they were coals to Newcastle, too, for there was the king, with apes and peacocks by the hundred already in his heart. . . . 'One man among a thousand' he had found, said he, but 'not a woman among all those.' O king, live forever! . . . With permission, you did not seek her with your usual wisdom. . . . Who were you, with your love of strange women—your Moabites, and Ammonites, and Edomites, and Zidonians . . . your Pharaoh's daughter and your seven hundred wives' princesses and three hundred concubines. . . . Who were you, I say, that the woman in a thousand should reveal herself to you? That is the punishment of men and kings who love nine hundred and ninety-nine strange women, that the thousandth woman is not found of them. . . . At least, it is so dreamt

of in my philosophy. . . . And here am I, with the ape chittering in my ear, and the peacock ruffling in my breast, all because a man I truly love is in love with a woman whom I do not love, and is like to win her. . . . But he wouldn't have swum in that storm with her as I did! . . . There goes the Peacock. . . . Never will he light those cool eyes of hers. . . . That's my brave Ape. . . . Is it because it seems a sort of waste that that elemental creature should keep the embers on little Gigino's hearth and bear his temperate children? That's part of it. . . . Yes. . . . But the Ape has more to say than that, and the Peacock, too. . . . Gigino is the salt of the earth, but one craves a little pepper now and then. . . . It's a man, a man, a man should woo that woman. She should be haled by the hair of her head upon his saddle-bow, and away with them both into the night, as the great Magyar rode off with the wood-cutter's daughter in the dark backward and abysm of time. . . . Yes . . . she hails from there . . . from 'the dark backward and abysm of time.' . . . Thousands of years has her soul slept in that womb, and now, though she's born into the flesh again, she will not truly waken except under the kiss of kisses. . . . Can Gigino . . . little, kindly, moderate, reasonable, admirable Gigino give her that kiss? I doubt it. Could I? . . . If I loved her . . . even with the half of love? Could I? . . .

Could I? . . . And there are Ape and Peacock singing together like some burnt-out morning stars in a dawn of the Inferno. . . . Like all the wicked who are impotent themselves, they crave the sweet sight of apeness and peacockness in others. . . . What a beast I am even to think such thoughts!" he broke off in sound, every-day English. "As for the reality, I wouldn't harm a hair of her or Gigino's heads, and that much, thank God! is known even to the Ape and the Peacock."

He shook himself vigorously, and went down-stairs to ask Pedring, who was a sailorman by profession, and only stopping with his mother until his Scior came to Pallanza, about the little sail-boat that he was trying to hire.

Another month went by, during which Kent saw very little either of Varoni or the Rupins. The creative fever was at its hottest now, and he could not think or speak except in the personæ of his characters. Scenes, phrases came to him in swimming, while eating, as he fell asleep, as he woke. They were like a swarm of locusts feeding on the field of his identity. He was only the vehicle of his creations—had no longer any part in himself.

Then, as usual, in the midst of this soaring mood, came the reaction and the need of his fellows.

Varoni was in Milan for a few days, but he

knew that Dione would enjoy coming with him for a sail in the *Libellula*—the little English cutter that Varoni had succeeded in finding for him on Como.

She had only come to her buoy before the Osteria del Pesce d'Oro two days ago, and this morning there was a light and steady *tramontana*, that promised hours of good sailing.

So he went betimes to the House of the Weasel, and formally invited the Signora and Signorina Rupin to accompany him. The Signora, he well knew, would have to be carried by force upon any sail-boat whatever, but the Signorina, as he had foreseen, was frankly delighted with the idea.

As they rowed out to her in Ping's sloppy little dingey—her own was still at Taroni's being painted—Dione gazed at the pretty craft as some women gaze at jewels.

"Do you like her?" asked Kent. "A neat little minx, isn't she?"

"She is beautiful," said Dione. "She looks like a lovely musical instrument."

"She's a bit narrow in the beam, and carries more canvas than she ought to. That makes her heel over a good deal in a stiff breeze like this. . . . It won't make you nervous?"

"I am never nervous," said Dione. "Besides, you forget that I can swim."

"Rather not!" said Kent, smiling. "I never

saw a woman who could outswim you, and there are good swimmers in England."

"Did you not?" said Dione, and she looked pleased.

She knew enough about sailing to take the tiller on necessary occasions, to bring her about when ordered, and to keep her on a straight course, so that they two went alone.

"Pedring would have come, but I thought it would be jollier with just ourselves," said Kent, as he came back to the cockpit after hoisting the jib, and the *Libellula* dipped and courtesied, heeling over in the steady breeze as she left the buoy.

"Will you keep her a little longer, or shall I take the tiller?"

"I like to feel her, if you don't mind," said Dione. "She seems breathing . . . she seems alive. . . . The wind is like a soul in the sails."

Kent looked at her, charmed. She really was an inspiriting companion.

"Well," said he, "just keep her nose on that big gray scar in the Sasso—that will be our tack for a good bit."

He had intended reading to her the sketch that he had made of her story of Diana, but now the charm of her alertness as she held the tiller and watched the sail kept him from suggesting it.

The breeze stiffened; the motion was a quickening joy. Wave after wave, shattered by the

bow, stung back in spray that reached him sometimes as he sat above the cockpit to windward. And he watched the breeze, spreading from the horizon in iron-blue streaked with white, until, with hurrying shivers, it was upon them, and the rail down and the foam sluicing along the coaming and spurting over it.

"You'd better bring her up a bit," he warned.

As he spoke the whitecaps gleamed from a darker patch of blue, and the *Libellula* careened at an alarming angle with a sudden tumble of solid water inside her.

Dione jerked the boat a little too much into the wind, and the sails shook nervously, as an impatient horse shakes his bits. She did not excuse herself, however, which was characteristic—though she had kept the bowsprit on the scar, as Kent had bade her—but sat silent, her eyes intent upon the now steady sail and the lake to windward. Kent watched her for some moments, then he said:

"But surely you must have steered a sail-boat many a time before?"

"Yes, long ago. . . . Why do you say that? Is it because you think that I am steering better now?"

"You are steering wonderfully well. I didn't think we should have such a smart breeze or I'd have taken in a reef."

"Will you do it now?"

"No, not now that I see how you can steer. Really you're wonderful."

Dione gave him a half smile.

"Since you think so much of me as that," she then said, "I'll tell you that you had better reef her or come about. We are getting rather close to Pan's Mountain, and Pan doesn't permit familiarities . . ."

Kent glanced at the lowering pile right ahead.

"It does look pretty grim, doesn't it?" he admitted. "By Jove! See that puff! . . . It's all white! . . ."

This time she did not glance at him, but, all tense, met the breath of the mountain with half the mainsail shaking.

"*Brava!*" he could not help exclaiming. "And now we'll come about."

If he admired her in an expected phase, she admired him no less frankly as he braced himself and tugged at the jib with bare forearms, his spray-drenched shirt moulded to his straining back, powerful at the shoulders and tapering lean at the waist. His friend Varoni could not have pulled home a sheet like that, although he might be an excellent swordsman.

"What kind of a boat did you learn to sail in?" asked Kent, as he came and took up his old position near her.

"It was a very droll sort of boat, indeed," said Dione. "It was a flat-bottomed sort of canoe—

they call them '*sandolini*' here — three planks put together, pointed at both ends, and decked. My father gave it to me. He did not wish me to have a sail-boat. But that was what I most wanted. So I thought very hard, and then I did this. I had a lee-board tacked onto her all the way along underneath. Then I had a huge, very strong, quadrangular umbrella made. You see, it wasn't really a sail . . . it was only an oddly shaped umbrella, which I could hold at any angle, even going to windward. When a puff came too strong I just let it go overboard, and then paddled up to it and picked it up."

They laughed together, as they had done at their first meeting.

"The best sail for a canoe I ever heard of!" said he. "You must have been an adorable child."

"No . . . I don't think so. I was too silent. Only Cecca and my father liked me."

"Only they understood you, perhaps?"

"Perhaps," said Dione.

Little by little the breeze fell, the water lay dreaming. They came about and made for home, running down the faint wind with spinnaker set.

"What a gorgeous morning it has been!" said Kent. "We owe it all to Varoni, you know. He's the best chap alive."

"Yes, he is a pleasant little man," said Dione.

"'A pleasant little man!'" exclaimed Kent,

warmly. "He's much more than that, allow me to tell you, Signorina. You don't know him."

"No," said Dione. "I do not know him at all. But why are you so agitated? I do not doubt your affection for him?"

"Yes, but," said Kent, "when one has a friend like Gigino one wants him to be appreciated."

"If I knew him better I am sure that I should appreciate him. But to know just a little he is not very interesting."

"He is much better than interesting. He is solid gold."

"Yes, he is very solid," said Dione.

Kent flashed a quick glance at her, but she was quite grave.

"What I mean," said he, after a pause, "is that he is one of those men in a million, who is not only the best friend in the world, but to whom a woman could trust herself entirely. He is constancy itself. A woman marrying him could feel safe for life."

"I do not think that to feel safe is so very amusing," said Dione.

"But a woman doesn't marry to be amused. She marries to . . . to . . ."

"To what?" said Dione.

"Well, to establish herself in life," ended Kent, rather baldly.

"I suppose that is why so many marriages are

unhappy, and so many men take mistresses," said Dione.

Kent was astounded. Not in this fashion did young Italian girls usually talk.

"It seems to me that I have shocked you," said his guest. "But I do not see why. You know already that I think. And when one thinks one cannot think of some things and not of others."

"That is certainly true," admitted Kent. "And I am not shocked. I was startled a little, perhaps."

"If you allow me to startle you so easily you will not be comfortable when we speak together, and that would be a pity."

"I think I was exceedingly silly to be startled," said Kent, "and I beg your pardon."

"It is nothing," said Dione.

CHAPTER XX

"NOW," said Kent, a few moments later, when, under his direction, she had brought the *Libellula* about and they were heading toward Oggebbio, "may I read you your own poem?"

"You may read it, certainly, if you will be so kind. But do not call it a poem. Poetry is too great a thing to speak of so lightly. Besides, it makes me uncomfortable."

"Very well; I won't say anything more," said Kent, who knew that she was speaking truthfully. "But just listen, and see for yourself if I am not right."

His Italian was not bad, but although full of foreignisms had a savor of its own.

"There," he said, when he had finished, "are you not a little surprised?"

"It is not ugly," said Dione, "but it is not poetry. I suppose my Servian blood makes it natural for me to put things into sorts of songs or stories. . . . There is so much of that among our people. They gather together in winter, over the fires built in a hole in the floor mostly, and sing songs and tales to musical instruments,

something like the *balalaïka* of the Russians. My father taught me some of them. He said I was too small to understand them, but he wanted me to know some of the folk-songs of my country. Now I understand them, and I find them very wild and sad."

"Could you repeat some to me?" asked Kent, eagerly. "I should love to hear them."

"Surely," said Dione. "But take the tiller please, for I do not know how to steer well enough to do so and repeat verses at the same time."

She laid her hands one within the other, palms upward, along her knee. She thought awhile; then she said:

"The girls in Servia are very tall and strong—as I am. They are kindly, but underneath they are wild and revengeful very often . . . so my father told me. And they carve very beautifully, and paint well with simple, bright colours. In the winter they paint many eggs against Eastertide. I tell you this so that you may understand the song I am going to repeat for you. Now I will say it."

Her low, chaunting tones blew past him out along the bright water:

"*My eyes are the eyes of a strange woman,*
Blue they are as the wings of a blue moth;
My mother came from a far country.
For my eyes he loved me;
Now have my tears washed away their colour.

He loves them no more.
Though I was born in the village,
In the village I am a stranger.
I will go back to the far country of my mother.

"*All the winter I staid alone painting eggs for Easter.*
With my tears stained by my eyes
I made them a beautiful blue colour;
With the blood that had left my heart,
Scarlet I made them.
With the gold of the ring never to be worn,
I gilded them in little patterns.

"*My heart is empty as the shells I have painted*
In the long, long winter;
Out of them will come no little life.
For me there will be no Easter
When I return to the far country of my mother."

Kent thought that he had never heard anything more plaintive than this simple folk-song, chaunted in that low, quiet voice.

"Thank you," he said. "It has the strangest, wistful charm. May I hear another?"

"I will say you a different kind of one," said Dione. "This is a love-song:

"*My hands are fast in the mane of his young stallion,*
The earth flies backward like a spindle unwinding.
The wind drinks my breath,
But the breath of my lover is on my neck.
His hand is on the lock of my heart.
Close he holds me and safe,
As the earth flies backward like a spindle unwinding.

Now if Death should drink my breath, like the wind,
Glad would I be.
For then would I never feel the hand of my lover
Fall from the lock of my heart.

"*My hands are fast in the mane of his young stallion,*
The earth flies backward like a spindle unwinding."

"That is really fine," said Kent. "One feels the keen thrill and smart of it. The night, the galloping horse, the man and maid clutched fast on its throbbing back."

He looked at the firm, strong hands upon her knee, and his own simile of the Magyar came back to him. He could well fancy her with those hands wound fast in the mane of a young stallion, speeding away with her wild lover into the night. And Gigino, balanced, moderate, conventional, was in love with this girl! Verily love was the master prankster!

"There is another, different still," said Dione. "It is very wild and cruel. It is called 'The Fierce Maiden.' Shall I say it to you?"

"Please," said Kent.

Chaunted Dione:

"*There is that in my heart that will not let me sleep;*
There is that beneath my heart that cries without a voice.
I was not alone in the summer;
In the winter I was all alone.
The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire.

"*Many times he kissed me upon the eyes,*
And many, many times upon the mouth.
And he said to me: 'Thou art mine.'
And to him I said: 'I am thine.'
The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire.

"*Then when I had waited many days*
He came to me, and all the bells were ringing.
He came only to say that he must go.
'Why must thou go?' I asked that fair evil.
And he answered: 'They wait for me at the wedding.'
Then that beneath my heart cried without a voice,
And I spake to him as it bade me:
'Go then, but not until I have given thee a last kiss.'
And as he lay upon the wolf-skin before my fire,
I, with my dagger dear,
Made a new mouth to kiss, above his heart.
Red, red its lips: I kissed them many times.
The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire."

"That has the master ring in it," said Kent. "One feels that it is true."

"Yes, it is true. My countrywomen often kill for certain wrongs."

"Why do you say 'my countrywomen?' Do you not feel yourself an Italian?"

Dione shook her head.

"I am all like my father and my father's people," said she.

"Do you think that you could take your 'dagger dear' and make an end of one who had wronged you?"

"There are many persons in us that we do not

know until they come forth and say 'I am thou also.' . . . Ever since I was very little I have been making acquaintance with new Diones. How could I say? I am Servian. I am slow to anger, but my anger could be very great, I think. Then perhaps . . . but none knows these things until they happen."

Thought Kent:

"I said that she was like a young Fate. I believe that under certain circumstances she might use a dagger without a quiver. . . . My poor Gigino!"

But somehow this thought, instead of repelling him, drew the girl strangely nearer. Like all bright, dangerous natures, he loved bright, dangerous things. There were primeval forces throbbing there so near him, under the smooth, white linen of that commonplace little blouse. He felt it as he had never felt it before. Somehow these songs of her native land, chaunted by her to him in a far country, had made her more real, more imminent.

"'*The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire*,'" he said, aloud. "That is a haunting line."

"Yes. It keeps repeating itself in one's mind after one has said it."

"Have you ever repeated any of these songs to Gigino?"

She opened her eyes quite wide upon his for the

first time. They were a beautiful colour, like the lake mountains just before a storm.

"To the Signor Varoni?" said she, in amazement. "But how can you ask? Surely you must know that they would shock him terribly."

"No, really. I don't think so. Gigino is not as narrow-minded as all that."

"I cannot know the width of his mind, but I know that those songs would shock him."

"I think you do him injustice," persisted Kent.

"I do not do him injustice. I only know very well by this time what would shock him and what would not."

"Well, I think you are mistaken—but never mind. And you really did not think I ruined your lovely Diana story with my foreigner's Italian?"

"No," said Dione. "You must truly be a great poet in your own language, for even in Italian, which you cannot know as you do that, you say things in a different way from others. You take a familiar word and put it in a new place. It is like seeing a little child that one has seen every day, put in a holy procession. It becomes different and takes a new grace."

"Thank you," said Kent. "You pay me a great compliment."

"It is not a compliment," returned Dione. "It is just the truth."

Kent gazed at her consideringly as she looked

past him up at the full sail, for she was steering again now. Truly there was a mine of pure jewels in this nature. Could Gigino polish and set them fitly?

"He might as well set the Iron Crown of Lombardy on his brow!" thought Kent, with a sudden spurt of spontaneity.

The *tramontana* was now breathing itself gently to sleep. It was near lunch-time, but the mooring was in sight.

"If you will allow me," said Kent, taking out his note-book and the nibbled silver pencil, "I will write down those songs. The wind is so light now that I can steer very well with the tiller between my knees like this and write at the same time."

He sat on deck just abaft the cockpit and scribbled industriously while Dione chaunted a second time the folk-songs of her far country.

CHAPTER XXI

KENT'S work did not go so well for the next week or two. He had got, as it were, "out of touch" with his characters. Instead of that glad and mystic oneness with them, as of a mother with the child she carries beneath her heart, there came the sense of apartness, of a thing being made instead of a thing growing. The Lady Lisa evaded him, grew as diaphanous as the cloud image of the real Helen.

"The matter is," thought he, discontentedly, "that I've let myself get interested in outside matters. I ought to go into retreat with the Trappist monks when I begin a thing like this. I ought to hear no real voices and see only a strip of sky through a tilted shutter. How is one to keep a vampirish lady, 'older than the rocks among which she sits,' clear in one's mind when one is incessantly wondering about the destiny of another creature who is as young as Eve, still warm with Adam's side, and less like a vampire than a white hawk is? I'm sort of subconsciously bothering over that young woman nearly all the time. If she would only take or

leave Gigino, I think I could settle down. I wonder what move he's made lately? . . . I'll just knock off work, and look him up this afternoon and find out. . . . Eh! but if a man's diurnal shaving makes up for the pangs of childbirth, as Byron said, what of the parturition of a five-act drama with the Monna Lisa for leading lady? . . . Yes, I'll have a talk with Gigino. . . ."

Varoni was only too glad to talk with his friend. He had kept away from him because of his work, and assented gladly when Kent proposed that they should have a tramp together.

"And how," said Kent, almost as soon as they had started, "how goes the venture upon 'the dragon marriage'?"

"I have asked the permission of the Signora Rupin to pay my addresses to her daughter," answered Varoni, "and she has consented."

"'Consented!' . . . I should rather fancy she had. . . . She had consented long before you asked her, my dear. . . . It isn't she who has to be reckoned with, but the young lady herself."

"That I know as well as you, Alareec, but you yourself advised me *festina lente*. . . . That is what I am forcing myself to do. It is hard, but I have come to agree with you that it is better. In two days I shall have to go to England again. When I return . . . yes, then I shall ask her."

"How long do you expect to be gone?" said Kent.

"About ten days or a fortnight. All will be very easily arranged if she consents. . . . Her mother and I talked very frankly. I have asked especially that she should say nothing to her daughter until I speak myself. The Signorina has also a small *dot*, which is very well."

Kent stopped and looked at him.

"You Latins are the oddest mixture," said he, finally. "Fancy asking about the *dot* of Atalanta. Besides, as beastly rich as you are, Gigino, what earthly difference can it make to you whether she comes to you in cloth of gold or in one shift, like Cophetua's beggar-maid? It is really the rummiest thing!"

"You do not understand," said Varoni, patiently. "It is an excellent thing for a young girl to bring with her even a small sum of money when she marries. It gives her a certain independence—a certain feeling of dignity. I wonder that you should not see that."

"Yes . . . but . . ." said Kent, "when one is such a geyser of love as you are, to think about such a thing at all seems odd."

"We Italians are practical as well as passionate," said Varoni. "It is a good mixture, I think."

"Admirable," assented Kent, gravely.

They walked on for a little while in silence; then Kent said:

"So you will make the great venture in about ten days, then? . . . What do you think, Gigino *mio*, that she will say to you?"

Varoni shook his head.

"I know no more than you," said he. "She is quite simple and open, and yet it is not an easy nature to read."

"No," said Kent, "it certainly is not. . . . I doubt if she finds herself easy reading," he added, after a moment's thought.

"*Chi lo sa?*" said Varoni.

He left for England the following Wednesday, and the day after, the play progressing no better and the *tramontana* being perfect, Kent decided to ask Dione to sail with him again.

Cruising one day as the wind carried him, he had sailed past Santa Catterina and come upon the most lovely, wistful spot on the eastern shore of the lake. It was a rocky point that stood out in the fair waters, the little mediæval village of Arolo—or "Roeu," as it is called in the dialect—to its left; a shallow, reedy bay fringed with Lombard poplars, curving far into the melting distance, on its right. An *osteria* stood on the point, which was called Rocca Moro, and enfolding it were natural lawns and forests in which Melisande might have walked day-dreaming.

"Yes," thought Kent, "I will ask her to come to Rocca Moro and lunch there with me. It will be an all-day affair, so I shall propose taking

the beautiful old Cecca along to play propriety."

Dione was as frankly glad to go with him as usual, her Signora Mamma quite as glad to have her go, and Cecca, after the first appalled recoil of an old Italian peasant woman asked to go for pleasure on a sail-boat, crossed herself elaborately and consented.

The morning was one of those that come to the lake in early August, dancing like Cinderella on shoes of glass. All was of glass—a thin, Venetian glass of azure-gray shot with silver—the sky, the mountains, the water. On every side the landscape dreamed, a world of transparent loveliness, blown lightly into space by some master workman, film on delicate film of a stuff lighter than gossamer.

"Eh, Cecca *mia*," said Dione to her old nurse, "are you not glad that you came? Is it not like sailing upon the sea of glass in the Scripture? Do we not go smoothly?"

"Ay, well enough at present," admitted Cecca, cautiously. "But there are many winds in the sack of the sky. This is not the only one. And many of them are rough-and-tumble fellows, not a gentle little Sciora of a breeze like this."

"But the sky, Cecca, look at the sky! . . . There are no clouds there at all. Only a sort of silver dust, as though the stars had been ground into powder to make the daylight."

"Eh, Gioia," said Cecca, "clouds are like a woman's humours. One never knows when or whence they come, or why, *per Dio!*"

Kent laughed.

"Cecca is right," said he, "especially upon this lake of hers which she knows well, it seems; but for to-day I can promise her fair weather."

Cecca made the sign against evil.

"At any rate," said she "I have that here in the bosom of my dress will protect us all."

And she looked knowingly at Dione. Dione, in her turn, cast an apprehensive glance at Kent. She was dreadfully afraid for a second that Cecca was about to mention the fact of having that treasured caul in her bosom. But Cecca nodded reassuringly. "Have no fear, Gioia," said she. "I know better than most when to speak and when to be silent."

Kent, busied in trimming the sails so as to pass as close to Santa Catterina as possible, missed this little side scene, and Dione drew a long breath of relief.

She had put a knot of orange ribbon under her white collar to celebrate the occasion of an all-day *gita* in the *Libellula*, and Kent noticed suddenly the reflected glow that it sent up under her smooth chin.

"She is quite beautiful to-day," thought he. "Sometimes she is almost plain. She changes like the lake."

"Will you steer now?" he asked, and Cecca's two hands went up in protest.

"*Signor!*" cried she, "do not do such a thing as that, and me in this mad little vessel. At least let me feel that a man is guiding it."

"There is no danger," said Dione. "See . . . you could do it yourself. . . ."

"The Madonna forsake me," said Cecca earnestly, "if I lay so much as the tip of a finger-nail on that piece of copper. . . . And do you sit farther away, Gioia *mia*. The first thing you know we shall all be drinking each other's healths in water if you meddle with it. And that, you know, is not good luck," she wound up with a smile.

"Very well. I will steer all the way myself," said Kent, "but on one condition . . . that you tell us some ghost or witch stories."

"May all the saints protect us!" cried Cecca, "making horns" with both hands. "Do not even mention such things at a time like this. . . . I entreat you seriously. Besides, I do not like to talk that others may laugh at me."

"You are mistaken truly if you think that I would laugh at you," said Kent. "My dear old nurse—she is dead now, the Virgin be good to her—was from an island called Ireland, where folk know much about such things. And she was also what is called a 'blood-healer.' Do you know what that is? . . . Very well, I will tell

you. It is a person who can lay her fingers to the lips of the most severe wound and cause the blood to cease flowing by repeating some magic words. And this is a true thing, for this old nurse—Moira she was called—saved my life when I was a little lad by stopping the blood from a scythe-cut in my foot. There is the scar now . . ."

And he turned sidewise his bare foot in its cord-sandal, that she might see the scar on his ankle.

"*Santa Maria!*" breathed Cecca. She looked at Kent with a new interest, and said within herself, "May the Virgin prosper him," more heartily than ever.

Dione also gave him a new look. This was something that she had long wanted to know. He believed, then, in the incredible and unseen, even as she did. She was glad.

"*Eh, la Peppa!*" said Cecca, as she lifted herself from an earnest scrutiny of the ugly white cicatrix. "Then I will tell you something, since you do not scoff . . . I kept the Signore waiting a bit for me this morning, eh, Signore? . . . Very well. . . . It was because I had so sharp a pain in my thigh that unless I had cured it I could not have come along to-day. 'And how did you cure it, Cecca?' say you. . . . Very well. . . . Listen. . . . Last Sunday I went to church in a new gown and the headkerchief my young

Sciora here gave me lately . . . and there was a certain person there . . ." (she "made horns") ". . . who, as I passed her, just touched me here . . . with the tip of her finger. Very well. I know what *that* means. . . . And, sure enough, no sooner am I at home again than a *bolic* pain seizes me so that I can scarcely walk. . . . I know that physic is no use . . . so I read and read in my books of good magic. . . . Not till this morning did I come upon the right thing. . . . Very well. . . . When I kept the Signore waiting this is what I was about. I get me three pinches of salt, and I say over them certain words, . . . and then I touch that finger-mark with the three pinches of salt, one after the other, and then, quick! into the fire with 'em, saying, '*Va all' Inferno!—Zzt! Paf! Crrk!* . . . The Signore should have heard them popping . . . like *devilkins* diving back into hell . . . but the pain went with them, eh, *per Dio!* There . . . that is a true tale for a true tale, so none is the loser. . . ."

They were now coming alongside of Rocca Moro, and Kent went forward to lower the jib.

CHAPTER XXII

"NOW," said Kent, as they mounted the old stone steps to the *osteria*, with Cecca following at a respectful distance, "let us order Cecca a gorgeous repast of all that she loves best, and then go and picnic on one of those lovely wild lawns that I am dying to show you . . . see . . . that shady slant of turf and wild flowers there, just beyond the hedge. From this terrace Cecca can keep an eye on us, and gossip also with the padrona to her heart's content."

"Yes . . . that is just what I should like," said Dione.

He rushed about like a boy, tipping right and left with his usual English improvidence, and soon they were seated among the fragrant grasses, a coarse, clean cloth between them, and upon it a bottle of white wine, a fragrant *risotto* with saffron, and a bowl of salad. Kent had brought some apples from Ceredo.

He watched her, smiling, for a moment, as she ate seriously, taking, now and then, little swallows of wine that ran with a ripple down her white throat.

"With permission," said he, "I do love to see you eat."

"To see me eat?" said Dione, and paused with a leaf of lettuce just touching her bright lips.

"Yes, Signorina, to see you eat. . . . There are not many people in this monotonous world who eat with such earnestness and yet with such charm as you do."

"I did not think that any one could eat with charm," said Dione. "But I do like very much to eat . . . when I am hungry."

Kent thought of the Lady Lisa, and smiled again. Yes, it was just Dione and her vibrant personality that had shaken the clear vision of that other in his mind's mirror. . . . The Lady Lisa might have eaten rice with a bodkin like Amina, but she would never have put whole spoonfuls of it with such frank zest between her subtle lips. . . .

"And now that this excellent *risotto* has nearly gone," pursued he, "and you feel somewhat refreshed, I will ask you to turn your head a little and look at that lovely bay and the long line of poplars. . . . Is it not one of the most beautiful things that you ever saw?"

Dione looked at it quietly for some moments. Then she said:

"It is truly very beautiful, but very sad also. It is like a woman who has wept herself to sleep."

"You *are* a poet," said Kent, gleefully. "You're always betraying yourself."

Dione looked at him, then at the curve of bay again, but she said nothing. She was thinking that what she felt must be happiness, and that she had never been happy in all her life before.

"A penny," said Kent.

"A penny?"

"Yes . . . we say in England 'a penny for your thoughts.'"

"My thoughts are not for sale yet, . . . though you do call me a poet," said she, with her rare, transforming smile. "Some day . . . when I have made a little book of them, perhaps . . . yes . . . perhaps then, I shall sell you the little book for . . . it will be a great price that I shall ask for my little book."

"I would give any price," said Kent.

"You do not know what I might ask."

"I will pay without knowing."

"For one little book?"

"For the book of your thoughts," said Kent.

"That would be just myself."

"Well, you know the price of a virtuous woman," said he, lightly; "it is above rubies."

"I think, after all, that I would not sell that book at any price," said Dione, gravely.

"But you would let me read a little in it, here and there, wouldn't you?"

"It seems to me that I have done that already."

"Oh, but not half enough," said Kent.

"Listen," said Dione. "I have something serious to say. I want very much that you should read me something in one of your real books."

"But they are not translated into Italian, my dear Signorina. I haven't yet reached that point of greatness."

"You could translate for me."

"No . . . . hardly. I do not think that even my great works would bear that test. I will tell you what the last one—the one that I am writing now—is about, though, if you would like to hear."

And, lying at full length in the grass beside her, he told her his play of Leonardo and the Lady Lisa.

"It is very original," said Dione, when he had finished. "I do not think that any one else ever thought of such a thing. But tell me"—she looked at her own long, tapering hand and the grass shadows that laced it—"tell me truly, . . . is that the kind of woman that you most admire?"

"One admires so many women in so many different ways," said Kent, amused. "Now, you, for instance . . . with permission I should like to write a poem about you and call it 'Eve Unrepentant.'"

Dione considered this.

"If you please, will you tell me why you wish it?" she asked at last.

"It is because if you had been in Eve's place I am quite sure that you would not have waited in that commonplace way for the serpent to tempt you. You see, Eve had no imagination whatever. It never occurred to her, until suggested by another, that it would be an interesting and vital experience to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. And when she did finally do so, it was in the very dull manner related in the story. Now you"—he lifted himself on his elbow, and looked up at her gravely—"yes, you, I am quite sure, would have been reflecting upon the forbidden tree from the moment that it was forbidden. And very soon you would have said to yourself, 'It is true that I do not know what is the meaning of this death of which the Lord spoke, but it seems to me that it would be better to have knowledge even of good and evil, whatever they may be, than to remain ignorantly thus, admiring each other and playing with the beasts, without knowing why, or, indeed, without knowing anything at all.' In a word," continued Kent, tickled with his own fancy, and spinning it out as he saw that she was interested, "in a word, you would have been very much bored in Eden, and you would have thought 'I prefer to accept the anger of the Lord together with the knowledge of good and evil rather than to remain in total ignorance and *ennui*. Besides,' you would have reflected,

'I am quite sure that there must be a Lord above this Lord who would not grudge me anything that He has made.'

"And so one day you would have walked quietly to the Tree of Knowledge, before the serpent had entered Eden, and you would have eaten of its fruit with that frank gusto which I have already told you that I find charming. You would not have offered Adam any, I think. You would merely have told him your own opinion, and left it to him to decide for himself. Then you would never have thought for an instant of hiding or of making yourself a silly frock of leaves. You would have just listened with grave respect to the words of the Lord when He came in the cool of the evening. Then when He had finished you would have said, 'It is perfectly just,' and before the angel could have lifted his flaming sword you would have walked quietly out of Eden of your own accord.

"Now I have told you exactly why I should like to write a poem about you and call it 'Eve Unrepentant.'"

Dione was smiling. Her thick lashes were lowered, and she played with a blade of grass, looping it in and out between her fingers.

"There is something in what you say," she observed, still smiling. "I used to wonder long ago, why, when Eve had been created so very silly, the Lord objected so much to her having a

little knowledge of good and evil. It would be impossible, it seems to me, that even God could be much interested in a being who had no knowledge of good and evil. I should think that He would want his creatures to choose to serve Him, not just to be good as a fish is a fish or an egg an egg."

"Shall I write the poem?" asked Kent, with his eyes still on her.

"It would make a very amusing poem," said Dione.

"Then I will write it. May I dedicate it 'To Dione'?"

"Surely . . . it will be a great honour."

Then she smiled again.

"What you have been saying reminds me of a strange old song of my country . . . very, very old it is, my father told me. It is a song that was sung to the newly married. I always thought it very strange and true, though most people, I suppose, would consider it blasphemous. Would you like to hear it?"

"Of all things," said Kent.

"Very well," said Dione, and she began in that low, measured chaunting:

"The Lady Eve was singing to her first-born;
Adam, her lord, worked in the ripe maize-field.
Happy was she; her song came forth with smiling:
'Sleep little Cain, a secret I will tell thee:
God came in likeness of a snake to Eden Garden.'

"Awake, O loving bride! Come forth glad bride-
groom!
Thy spade leans idle and the maize is ready.
Thy pitcher, girl, stands empty at the fountain.
Work after love, and loving after working.
God came in likeness of a snake to Eden Garden."

Kent looked at her for a time in silence when she had finished, then he said:

"Yes . . . you are certainly of the race that produced that poem."

"I should certainly prefer love and work out of Eden to love and idleness in it," answered Dione. "I could not have gone about hand in hand with Adam forever, doing nothing but just love him. I should have grown to hate him."

"Yet it would have been pleasant to return there sometimes . . . 'in the cool of the day,'" said Kent, smiling.

"I think each man and woman must make a little Eden for themselves," said Dione, answering his smile. "I think that would be much more amusing."

"They do, . . . but they always get driven out. And they cannot return, either. It is the old story repeating itself."

"The sword of flame could not keep me from returning," said Dione.

"Ah, but it isn't only the sword of flame. The Edens that men and women make, vanish utterly . . . are swallowed up as by a sort of heaven-

quake. . . . There would be no garden for you to return to."

"That is very sad if it is true," said Dione. "But I cannot think that it is always true."

"Always . . . always," said Kent, with the first bitterness that she had ever heard in his voice. "Always," he repeated a third time.

Neither said anything more for some moments; then Dione ventured on one of her amazing franknesses. "It seems such a pity that people have to marry," said she. "It is that, I think, that swallows up the Edens."

"You do not believe in marriage?" Kent asked, curiously.

"*Si*, I believe in it—for the children. Only for the children. As the world is now, the children must bear names, and it is necessary that they have a right to them. Otherwise it seems to me that every woman should only want a man to remain with her as long as he loved her. When that ceased then the marriage would be unmade. At least, that is the way that I feel about it."

"And you would let a man go—you would set him free just because he loved you no longer?"

"But . . . as the air!" said Dione, and she made an outward gesture with both palms upturned.

"Ah," said Kent, "you think so. You could not know until you had been tested."

"I believe that I know exactly," said Dione.

There was another pause.

"Well," said Kent, after a while, "with permission, you are certainly a very remarkable young girl to have been born on the shores of Lago Maggiore and never to have travelled from them."

"I know what you mean," she returned, gravely; "but it is what moves in our minds, not the moving about of our bodies, I think, that makes us remarkable or not remarkable. I have travelled many leagues in my mind."

"I wonder," said Kent, thinking aloud what he had so often thought to himself—"I wonder what your destiny will be?"

"I wonder very much myself—often," said Dione.

"Should I be impertinent if I asked whether you have ever thought yourself in love with any one?"

"No," said Dione, frankly. "No, you are not impertinent—and, no, I have never been in love with any one."

Kent glanced at her, then gave himself a mental shake. "You should get Cecca to tell your fortune," he said, lightly. "I am sure that it would be quite unique."

Dione shook her head.

"Cecca has told my fortune very often," said she. "The cards are always most stupid. A

fair man, a dark man, jealousy, a quarrel, a rich marriage, many children, all boys—" She broke off, and her lips tilted in laughter. "That is the only part that is not stupid—all those little boys," she said, gayly. "If I ever have children I wish them all to be sons."

Kent thought of Lady Macbeth, and the contrast made him laugh also. He was growing accustomed to Dione's unparalleled candour.

"But has Cecca only told your fortune with the cards?" he then asked. "Has she never told it by the lines on your hand?"

"No . . . never," said Dione, looking curiously at her smooth, carmine-flushed palm. "I do not think that she knows how. That must be very amusing."

"I used to know a good bit about it," said Kent. "I think that I remember enough to tell your fortune. Shall I try?"

"Please," said Dione, much interested.

"Then give me your hand. . . . No, your right one first."

He held out his own hand, and after the merest breath of hesitation the girl laid hers in it. But no sooner did the warm, flexile palm touch his than there went a shock through all Kent's veins —that singing thrill of the sharp blood that is like the swarming of sparks in a sudden draught. His heart caught on a beat. He stayed for a moment gazing down at the firm young hand

that rested upon his without seeing it. Then suddenly his eyes cleared, and it seemed to him that a little tremour ran through it too, so slight that it was not more than the quiver of heat above a summer field.

Had she also felt it—that mysterious pang that for the instant fuses two life-currents into one? And why? . . . And how? . . . Never had she appealed to him from the side of sex. Never had she aroused in him other than a keen sense of interest and curiosity. The Ape and the Peacock had never so much as stirred in their sleep at the thought of her. . . . Yes, once, perhaps, but even then it was from no such emotion as this . . . but from the merest flash of that primitive sense of rivalry which lies latent in all males, and is apt to move uneasily in the presence of a too-confident lover.

He commanded his voice with an effort, and managed to string together some of the commonplaces of palmistry. Then he quickly released her hand.

"Thank you," said Dione, "I think that it must be time to return now."

She spoke also in a low voice, and busied herself in gathering together her gloves and little blue cotton sunshade.

They went back to the *osteria* without looking at each other and without saying anything more.

CHAPTER XXIII

KENT tried in vain that night to wrench his thoughts away from Dione. The new aspect in which he had seen her made him feel much as Orlando would have felt if, when thinking upon Rosalind in her page's dress, as a pleasant boy, he had come suddenly face to face with her in all the allurement of woman's fragrant attire.

His fancy played him tricks, would not be commanded. He ordered it sternly to weave him the pattern of the next act of his "Leonardo," and it leaped spirtishly to and fro, waving wisps and shreds of Dione's personality and appearance before his mental vision. Now it was the strange, gold-scarlet of her lip trembling suddenly like a petal under the bee. Now the black flamelets of her hair as they kept touching lightly her cheek and throat during the morning's sail. . . . Now he heard her full, young voice saying "No . . . I have never been in love. . . ." Then, rich with soft laughter, "I wish all my children to be sons. . . ." He thought of her freedom, her frankness, her clear

daring as of the young Eve, whom he himself had pictured, and who partook of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil untempted of the serpent, and led only by her own will. . . .

Angrily he coerced his mind: lighted a candle, set himself to read something bearing upon his drama. That prankish fancy of his wove wild arabesques between him and the sober pages—a tipsy elf working in her absence at a witch's loom, with all the feverish colours of just awakening desire.

Kent extinguished his candle again, and went out upon the balcony. The sky was freckled as with fire by the swarming stars, the lake in a deep sleep. Against the dark bulk of the Sasso di Ferro, Dione's face leaped suddenly toward his, clear and pale and distinct as in a flash of lightning. He saw again the tremour of the red lip, as of a petal under the bee, and the quivering of the fine nostrils.

"O cursed blood of man, always urging him back from the bright places," groaned he in his heart. "It is a flood that pours over a gulf—down, down—"

He stared up at the flashing sky that had sent him such sovereign messages of power and joy only a short time since. His creative mood was no longer upon him like a king's mantle, but hung heavily—a thing all tatters.

Then he thought suddenly of Varoni, and

went hot from head to foot with an honest shame.

"Yes," he said, setting his jaw, "I will not see the girl any more until Gigino comes back."

But he slept ill that night, and the next day the play went no better.

This state of mind lasted for three days. On the third night, about twelve o'clock, unable to endure longer the straitness of his bed and room, he sprang up, flung on his clothes, and went out of the house, far afield.

The night was low and gray—the *scirocco* blowing. He seemed to be walking through the fragrant steam from a vast cauldron in which a love-potion was brewing. All the night was laden with heavy scent of sunburnt peaches, of white jasmine, of roses overripe, of the swooning breath of gardenias. The subtly mingled perfumes played over his stretched senses like fingers over a harp—shrilling out wild chords, sounding a single note now and then with a pang as of physical pain, now merely thrumming softly, now striking with the open palm. He smarted with the fierce sense of helplessness, lowered his head, walked faster. Almost he ran, plunging into the dense night at random, scaling walls, trampling through young maize—going on and on and on, in the urgency of out-tiring those rebellious senses.

And then suddenly, barely halting in time,

he almost struck against some one else in the uneasy gloom. The next moment he felt, rather than saw, that it was Dione. She caught her breath, and he heard her.

"You!" they both said together.

They stood quite still for a space, gazing toward each other through the shadows. At last Kent said:

"At least you have Masciett with you?"

And Dione answered:

"Yes, he is somewhere near."

Then again they stood silent.

"Signorina," said Kent at last, "you must let me take you back to your home. This is a dangerous madness—to go about on these mountains alone at midnight."

"No," said Dione, "it is not in the least dangerous. Nothing has ever happened here. I could not sleep, and the garden seemed too small to walk in. That is all."

"But your mother may chance to call you . . . or your nurse . . . and find you gone. And then they will be terribly alarmed."

"No," said Dione again, "Cecca sleeps too soundly, and my mother never calls me in the night."

"Nevertheless," said Kent, slowly, "I must take you back, and at once . . ."

"Very well . . . I will go with you," said Dione.

They turned, but the way was not clear before them.

"Do you know a direct way back?" asked Kent, after some moments.

"No," she answered. "I just walked on and on . . ."

"Have you any idea where we are?"

"I think that is Arlino . . . there, where you see that little glow. I think they are having a *festa* to-night. . . . If we come down by Arlino we shall be on the right way . . . but it is very steep."

"I can help you if it gets too rough," said Kent, after another pause. "Let us go straight across this field. . . . It seems to me that there is a rather high wall there. But I can help you over it quite easily. . . . Ah, here is Masciett!"

They went on in silence until they reached the wall. It was built of stones, and, as he had said, rather high. He swung himself on top.

"Now," he said, bending down to her, "set your foot securely on one of those jutting stones and give me both hands."

In another moment she was beside him.

"Wait," he then said, peering down. "There seems to be a ditch here . . . don't jump . . . I will get down first and then lift you down."

Dione did just as he bade her, but, in descending, her skirt caught on a stone. For an instant

she was on his breast. He steadied her lightly, and again they went on in silence.

They were next halted by a thick wood.

"I know this wood," said Dione, as he hesitated; "there is a rough road through it that leads round above Arlino. We must walk along it until we come to that road."

"Yes, that will be the best way," said Kent.

Dione went slowly, peering among the thick stems of the trees. At last she said:

"This is it . . . I have found it," and they turned into the dense and rustling darkness.

"I wonder," said Dione, after a few moments, "if Pan is abroad to-night?"

"Why? Do you feel frightened?"

"No," said Dione, "I feel happy."

Kent was silent.

"It always makes me happy to be abroad in the night," she added, when some moments had passed. "But I fear that you are really displeased with me, Signore?"

"I have no right to be displeased . . . but I am anxious for you. This was a mad thing to do."

"I love doing the things that others call mad," said she.

Kent was silent again.

Presently the girl said:

"It usually makes me angry for others to presume to be angry with me; but somehow I am not angry with you—I am only sorry."

"For God's sake!" said Kent, under his breath.

"If you please . . . what did you say?" asked Dione.

"I said that it is very good of you to be . . . to feel . . . not to be angry with me."

"No, it is not good of me. It comes naturally. Stop! . . . I walked against a tree then. . . . Here is another. . . . Can you see? . . . Are there trees in your way? . . . I fear that we are lost . . ."

"You are crazy!" exclaimed Kent, roughly. "It's impossible . . ."

He struck a match, and the near leaves sprang out in a delicate lacework against the night.

"Thank God!" he said at last, and guided her toward a stony path that went curling down to Arlino.

Suddenly Dione gave a little cry.

"Well?" said Kent, almost impatiently.

"I have run a thorn or a splinter of stone into my foot," said she. "One of my *zoccoli* turned, and my foot went down upon the ground."

"Very well," he answered, "if you will sit down there beside the path I will light another match and see what has happened."

He struck a match, and this time it was a throng of young birch stems that leaped like white dryads out of the darkness.

Dione slipped her bare foot from the wooden

patten, and Kent bent over it with the match. Then he handed her his match-case.

"It is only a thorn," said he; "if you will light me, I will take it out for you in a moment."

He lifted the shining foot upon his hand, and his blood shook at the contact. The thorn had a rough head, and was easily drawn out.

"Now bind your handkerchief around it," said Kent. "You will know better how tight to make it than I could."

Dione obeyed him, and when they had gone on a little way, she said:

"You are indeed very angry with me . . . I could see it in your face by the light of the matches."

Kent set his teeth.

"You are quite mistaken," he said, formally. "It would be an impertinence for me to be angry with you. As I said before, I am only deeply anxious for you. Suppose, for instance, that some one whom you know were to meet you near Arlino?"

"I should not care," said the girl, proudly. "I am ashamed of nothing that I do."

Kent groaned in spirit. He had the feeling of being in a genuine nightmare, which only differed from other nightmares in its intensity and reality. He thought that little Arlino must be trotting down the mountain-side before them, so interminable seemed the way to it.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE stony footpath which they were following looped suddenly upon itself, and took so sharp a fall that he was obliged to assist Dione in descending it. She gave him her hand frankly, and, balancing each other, they went cautiously down toward the festive glow above Arlino.

It was very dark in these woods, though the clouds had thinned somewhat, letting through the light of a sick moon.

They came out upon a little slope of newly mown grass directly overhanging the village. It was as if they stood on some high place in an open-air theatre and looked down upon a play. Laughter and gay shoutings and the nervous shiver of several mandolins floated up to them.

"If one of my *zoccoli* came off it would fall right among the dancers," said Dione, leaning over, with her arm about a tree. "How like impassioned mosquitoes those mandolins sound, do they not? Those must be strolling players. Our peasants do not use mandolins."

"I never heard of an impassioned mosquito," replied Kent, laughing in spite of himself.

"But if they should be impassioned, that is the way that they would sound," persisted she.

"Very likely," said Kent; "but we had better be getting on. Shall we have to pass through the village, or is there a way round?"

"There is a way round. Let us look just a few moments longer. How gay they are! What a little makes them happy! Ah, I should like to dance. . . . Now . . . out here . . . in the night . . . on this grass . . ."

"To the music of 'impassioned mosquitoes' and in *zoccoli*, and after having a thorn in your foot?" asked Kent, allowing himself to be amused, in the relief of having reached the right road, and deciding to leave her to go home alone as soon as they had circled the village.

"The thorn does not hurt now, and I could dance perfectly well in bare feet on this grass."

She took her arm from about the tree and turned to him. He was smiling.

"Ah," said she, "you are not vexed any more. . . . Let us dance, then! . . . In all my life I have never danced with a tall man . . ."

All Kent's mastered turbulencies swept back upon him in a rush. To hold that buoyant figure in his arms out here in the wide night, alone, he and she . . . to turn and turn with her against his breast, to that crude yet stirring peasant music . . . to feel the intimate perfume

of her hair in his nostrils, the pliant hand palm to palm with his . . . this would be . . .

"No," he said, curtly, "we really have no time. It must be well after two o'clock . . ."

"Why should people spoil everything with clocks? . . . What has time to do with this free night? . . . Come, let us dance . . ." said the girl, wilfully.

"I assure you . . . really . . ." began Kent. But she broke in:

"No. . . . No. . . . We must. . . . Just one dance, as the fauns and dryads dance on little lawns like this. . . . It will be such a nice thing to remember. I dance very well indeed," she added, naïvely, as she saw him waver. "As well as I swim . . . truly."

"*Viva Dio!*" exclaimed he, with a short laugh that she would have recognized as reckless had she known more of men. "Let us dance, then. . . ."

He took a step forward, put his arm about her; she laid her hand in his, and their full pulses beat into one. At that contact both were drowned in a wave of mutual consciousness that swayed as they swayed, dancing with them. . . . The strident throbbing of the mandolins seemed to pass into their blood. . . . The girl moved in a trance, the man in a fierce glow of pleasure. When he stopped suddenly she swayed where she stood, and he held her upright, his arm still about her.

They gazed into each other's pale faces, absorbed, forgetful of all else for the moment. . . .

At last Dione said, under her breath:

"How pale you are! . . . Am I pale, too?"

"Yes."

"Very pale?"

"Yes . . . very. . . ."

There was a pause. Still they stood there, unconsciously clasping tighter and tighter their interlaced fingers.

"In this light," whispered Dione, presently, not knowing that she was whispering, "your eyes are black. . . . In the day they are blue."

"Your eyes are black also. . . . And deep . . . deep."

He bent nearer, gazing into them. Suddenly the girl released her hand and pressed it over them.

"I am giddy . . . I do not know what it is . . ." she faltered.

In an instant Kent had helped her to a sort of chair among the oak roots.

"We danced too long . . . that is all," he said, in a stifled voice. "Rest there a minute, and then we must go on."

Before long Dione got to her feet, and they continued on their way toward Vareggio in silence. When they had passed round Arlino, and reached the footpath through the fields near her home, Kent stopped.

"It is better that I should leave you to go the rest of the way alone," he said, speaking very quietly, "but I shall stay here and watch until you are safe within the gate."

"Thank you," said Dione, in a scarcely audible voice. She was still faint and giddy with the spinning of that strange new fire through her veins.

"It is nothing," said Kent. "Just one thing more, though . . . I want you to make me a promise. I want you to promise me that you will never again do such a mad thing as you have done to-night."

For a second she felt that same recoil at the man-dominance in his tone which she had felt on first meeting him. Then a sweet rush of emotion totally new to her swept it away.

"Would it pain you if I did not promise?" she asked, softly.

"It would, indeed," he answered, with unmistakable earnestness.

"Then . . . though I hate promising. . . my father taught me never to make promises . . . I will promise you."

"Thank you from my heart," said Kent.

He did not seem to see her outstretched hand, but merely bowed as she said "Good-night" and left him.

Then, when she had passed from sight, he threw himself down, head on arms, in the field-grasses,

utterly spent, his brain a whirl of remorse . . . at odds with himself, with her, with the whole world. He lay there for more than an hour. When he rose to return to Ceredo the dawn was whitening along the sky.

Kent made up his mind in short order that morning. "There is but one thing for me to do," he told himself, "and that is to get away until Gigino comes back. I will go to Milan on the pretext of reading in the Ambrosiana for my play, and stop there until next Wednesday. For we are not just playing with fire, that wild girl and I—we are hurling it at each other," he wound up, with a flash of his usual whimsicality.

So he went by the twelve-o'clock boat that day, and established himself in his usual quarters in the Varoni's house, now empty and shrouded for the summer, with only old Guiseppe, the butler and his wife, to look after it.

The weather was suffocating, and he bored himself abominably; but the sense of even a somewhat tardy right-doing braced him and made things bearable. Never, in all his experience, though, had a week seemed of such duration. He missed his swims in the lake, his long walks among the mountains—more than these, he missed Dione in a fashion that startled him—missed her talk, so quaintly frank and original, her rare, soft laughter, her love of the things

that he loved . . . in a word, her companionship.

He still slept badly, and all night long he woke at intervals, roused by some vivid dream of her with the pang as of an actual sword in his flesh. Now he was swimming again with her to meet the storm. . . . Now she laid her hand in his for the first time, as on the lawn at Rocca Moro. . . . Now he held her in his arms again, after that wild dance by midnight above Arlino . . . and she whispered to him, "How pale you are! . . . Am I pale, too?" Again, it was as if he had told her the whole truth at last, and she lay sobbing face down upon the ground, a wild, free, primal thing in anguish, not to be comforted. . . .

From this last dream he started up with the sweat on his forehead.

"Lord God!" he said. "It can't be that I was beginning to love her really?"

And he dressed himself, though it was long past midnight, and went out and walked until day.

"The young Signore is surely returning this week, is he not, Beppino?" he asked the old butler on the fourth morning of his exile. "There is no mistake about it, I suppose?"

"No, Signore . . . there is no mistake. But the young Signore will go direct to the Signora Varoni at Pallanza. . . . He will not stop in Milan even for a night. . . . So he wrote last, Signore."

"Then that is all right," Kent told himself, with a sigh of relief. "And I shall be able to get out of this furnace of dreariness by Wednesday afternoon."

That same evening he sat at a little table in the Galleria. In spite of the sultry heat a constant stream of people passed back and forth. He recognized some faces that he used to see years ago, faces that one never saw during the day, that only appeared at night in the Galleria; and their owners argued excitedly, stopping to do so, and seeming to gather force from their motionless legs to put into the gesticulations of their arms and hands.

Now and then a group would drift out of the stream, and, eddying along its edge, settle round one of the little tables before a café. And thus it was all day long, he remembered, only the crowd varied with the time of day. The morning was the time of the *Gigioni*, the rank and file of singers who gathered here from North and South America, from St. Petersburg, London, Vienna, to brag about their exploits and look out for new *scritture*. At noon they vanished, giving way to the curb-market that spread from the near-by stock exchange. Then came evening, and the crowd of *habitués* out for a constitutional and the chance of meeting some one with whom to chat. This crowd again thinned toward midnight, when the audience of the surrounding

Manzoni, *Filodrammatici* or the *Scala*, would fill the place once more, this time with discussions over a new play or opera, far more lively than would be elicited in England or America by the last news of an important battle.

Then each café would become the club of a different set, the smartest, however, where art mingled with aristocracy, being the *ristorante* Cova, outside the Galleria. And now memories of months spent here caught hold of him again with their special charm, and he decided that this charm came from the wide diversity of Italian minds. No two thought alike on the same questions, while each opinion had its own fascinating touch of individual truth. What excellent literary, dramatic, and musical criticisms he had heard here! What splendid schemes for dramas and novels had been sketched in his presence by indefinitely future authors, who next morning forgot all about it, or postponed work until yet another day!

He especially recalled one young fellow, a clerk at the Municipio, who, while grinding mechanically at his office task all day, concocted at the same time the most delightful tales, which he would tell at night to an eager group of artists round one of these very tables. And though these little masterpieces might have brought him fame and money, he was quite content with the

delight of his small audience, and never wrote one down. . . .

Kent sighed restlessly, and wished that he would turn up now. Dione's face had just floated before him, and he wished exceedingly not to think of Dione.

A voice close by startled him—a big, resonant voice that he knew.

"*Come! . . . Lei qua?*" it said.

Kent turned, and jumped to his feet. It was his fencing-master of old days, Giordano Vanzi.

Their gladness was mutual. They shook hands boyishly again and again, and Vanzi, who was an enthusiast in "the noblest art of chivalry," as he termed it, and regarded it as a mission, inquired eagerly whether Kent had kept up his fencing.

"You are made for it," he said, just as he used to do. "Tall and supple as you are, I back myself to bring you invincible to any *torneo*. We'll have one next autumn. You must come to the *sala* to-morrow and get limbered up."

Kent accepted with glee. For over a year now he had not touched a foil he was ashamed to say, however, and feared that he would be rather rusty.

"Elbow grease will soon wear away that rust," said Vanzi. "When once the foundations are sound they stay forever. One can't forget how to fence any more than how to swim."

They talked and talked. With Vanzi the conversation could not drift away from fencing. His dream was to go to England to proselytize, and he had always hoped that Kent would help him to that end.

"But, my dear friend," said Kent, when Vanzi urged this on him, "you wouldn't be at all happy in England. In a country where boxing is the national method of fighting, and where duelling is extinct, people will never devote the time to fencing that they do here. With rare exceptions it never goes beyond a very amateurish performance with us. Here you can keep your pupils for two years, taking lessons every morning and practising exercises every afternoon, before you allow them to start in bouts. In England they begin that sort of thing after six months. . . . Even women can fence the way that we fence in England, and many do . . ."

"I've nothing against women fencing," said Vanzi. "There is a young Signorina of the nobility here whom I am teaching, and she is getting on capitally . . . but capitally. . . . When one comes to think of it, there are as good acrobats among women as among men."

"That is true," said Kent. And suddenly there was Dione before him again, in fencing costume this time, foil in hand. He almost started visibly at the suddenness of the inward sight and the thought that came with it, for here was one way

out of his perplexity—a way that, since he had to keep on seeing her, would allow him to do so with less danger to them both.

"Yes," he thought, as Vanzi went on expounding his theories, "I shall give her lessons in fencing . . . she will love it, and during the lessons I shall just stick to matter-of-fact business. And after them she will be too dead tired to want to talk or do anything but rest for a while. . . . Yes, that is it. . . . That is certainly a first-rate solution. . . ."

That he was right in supposing a good lesson to be tiring he found out next morning when he went to the Sala di Scherma for a bout with Vanzi.

He had not thought that one could deteriorate so in a year. His position needed continuous correction which, after the efficacious method of Vanzi, came down in sharp tappings of the master's foil on the inside of his knees, never sufficiently bent outward, and on his chest, never sufficiently effaced in profile. After half an hour of this he was drenched with perspiration and his thighs quivered.

That night he slept better, and woke next morning quite refreshed.

"Yes," he thought, exultantly, "the very thing! . . . I'll just take back a pair of foils and a couple of masks, and teach her fencing. . . . It will solve a lot of puzzles."

In this way he could avoid seeing her too often or too intimately, and yet not wound her, nor rouse Varoni's questionings.

"The very thing . . . the very thing . . ." he repeated to himself. "When we chance to be alone, a fencing-lesson. When there is a question of sailing, take Gigino along too."

Thus Kent, who imagined that he was thinking his own thoughts, and was merely deciding what destiny had already decided.

CHAPTER XXV

WHEN he reached Ceredo again he found, to his dismay, a letter from Varoni awaiting him, in which his friend said that he would be detained in London for another ten days or so. This seemed to Kent a very unfair thrust on the part of Fate. Then he determined that he would not go near the Rupins until sheer civility forced him to, and settled down into a calmer frame of mind.

It was the fourth day after his arrival. He was seated in the battered old steamer-chair which usually accompanied him on his travels, and which he liked to use when writing, and had just forced himself to concentrate all his mind on the opening of the second act of his "Leonardo." He felt quieter than for many days past. Some of the old creative mood had returned to him. He drew a long breath of content, and took out the silver pencil with its indelible lead point that he used instead of a pen.

He had but just begun the description of the scene when there came a low knock at his door.

"*Avanti!*" he called with considerable impa-

tience, then sprang to his feet as the slowly opening door revealed Dione upon his threshold.

"Signorina!" he cried. "You here! . . . Good God! What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened," said Dione. "I only came because I felt that you might never come to me again. . . . And . . . I . . . understood. And . . . I . . . wanted to . . . explain if . . . I could."

She was deadly pale. Even her bright lips looked dim, and under her eyes there were dark stains as from sleeplessness.

"You . . . you . . ." stammered Kent, literally dumfounded. Then he caught himself up with a gasp.

"But, Signorina," he urged, going over and standing beside her, "you cannot stay here. . . . Come, I will go back with you immediately."

"Wait," faltered Dione, paler than ever. "I do not remember ever being tired before . . . but to-day I am very tired. I must rest just a moment. . . . May I sit here?"

Kent placed a chair for her without a word. He was on thorns. Could it be possible that this girl lived in the twentieth century, and yet did not see that she was doing an unheard-of, unimaginable thing?

The next moment she lifted her clear, puzzled eyes to his, and said:

"Why cannot I stay a few moments? . . . I

know that it is not conventional to come to speak to you in your own rooms, but it is morning—it is very early. No one could think harm of it."

Kent felt really distracted.

"Signorina," he said, earnestly, after a second's hesitation, "let me assure you that people do not wait for sufficient causes before they think harm of others. Now that you are rested you must come with me at once. Heaven only grant that no one has seen you mount these stairs."

"Only Laura," said Dione, sadly, "and she has loved me since I was a little baby, and could not be made to think harm of me. But I will go at once, since you think it necessary."

They went down-stairs together, and out by an unfrequented way overhanging the lake, toward Vareggio.

The girl's intense pallor and darkened eyes gave Kent's heart a sickening twist.

"I care more than I thought . . . I care more than I thought," he reflected, wretchedly. "Poor child! She has been suffering savagely . . . she is suffering now . . . and I can't take her in my arms and comfort her. No, God! I can't. . . . I won't do that."

He was almost as pale as she when he turned from the road and made her sit beside him on the already purpling heather. Below them the lake sheened milkily under the *tramontana*. The

sky was full of those long, streaming clouds that are called "mares' tails."

"Now," said Kent in a gentle voice, as though speaking to a distressed child, and aching to take the slight hand that trembled among the heather and press it close to his breast—"now tell me, Signorina, how I can help you . . . and what it was that brought you to me this morning."

To his infinite dismay Dione suddenly covered her face with both hands and bowed down her head against them.

"Dione . . . my poor little Dione, what is it?" he said, in a shaking voice. He clenched his hand in order not to lay it upon that bowed head. "Tell me . . . tell me . . ." he urged. "Something terrible must have happened. . . . Won't you tell me, Dione?"

From behind her screening hands she spoke in a low voice, and he had to bend close to hear what it was that she said. She stammered, caught her breath . . . went on with difficulty.

"That night . . . that night . . . the night we . . . found each other . . . on the . . . mountain . . . when you . . . went away . . . it all . . . came to me . . . you thought me a . . . shameless girl. . . . You would not . . ."

But Kent had both her wrists in a fierce grasp. "Don't say such things to me!" he cried, thickly. "I forbid you . . . I forbid you to say such things. You little know . . ." He broke off helpless.

"Tell her all the truth now. Now is the time," urged a voice within him. "Tell her all of it . . . don't leave out one jot or one tittle. Now, before she looks at you again, tell her the truth, and set her and yourself free of this tangle."

"No, not now," urged another voice, still stronger. "You would be a brute to tell her now, when she is in this agony of shame. What you must do now is to clear her in her own eyes, to make her know beyond a doubt that you think of her as pure and good and maidenly. Later . . . yes, later you must tell her. That is your plain duty as a man. But not now . . . not as she is now."

"Listen, Dione," he said, in a quieter voice; "first of all I want to swear to you on my mother's honour that I respect you as I respect her. Do you believe me?"

The girl began to tremble from head to foot. The little sprays of heather that leaned against her shook with that heartrending tremour. He had no further doubt as to whether or not he loved her. His whole strength was taken in keeping himself from laying so much as a finger upon her piteously shaken body. And to this his care-free selfishness had reduced her—Dione, the untouched, the self-sufficing.

"Dione," he said again, his voice all hoarse and broken, "won't you say a word to me? . . . Won't you tell me that you believe me?"

She nodded her head, still unable to speak, and the trembling abated somewhat.

"Don't . . . be sad . . ." she said, on catching breaths, "I . . . do . . . believe you."

"God be praised," said Kent.

He felt suddenly sick, as after a heavy fall. And they sat there together, wordless and stricken, for some moments.

"I . . . thought . . ." whispered Dione again, "that you . . . meant to . . . to . . . show me what . . . you . . . thought . . . of me . . . by keeping . . . away from me."

"But now you know . . . you know forever, do you not?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Thank God," said Kent again, and again there fell silence between them.

Presently Dione said, in a new, exquisitely shy voice:

"I . . . I . . . thank you for . . . not . . . kissing me."

Kent almost burst into hysteric laughter. It was well that she was not looking at him, for his face twisted into a really horrible grimace. He mastered himself by a great effort, and said, quietly: "Why, Dione?"

"I . . . could not . . . bear it . . . now," she faltered.

Then Kent took his lower self in both hands and bent it down under him.

"Listen, Dione," he said, and his voice was so unnatural that she dropped her hands and looked up at him. But he did not look at her. He was livid, and his face a new face to her.

She put up a hand to her heart, and sat quite still, just gazing at him with parted lips. Presently, as he did not continue, she said, whispering:

"I listen."

Kent's lips were dry, and his voice sounded cracked in his own ears.

"There are . . . reasons," he said, "why I . . . cannot . . . say all that I would like to say to you . . . now, Dione."

She crept a little nearer to him through the heather.

"Do not be sad," she said, caressingly. "If you have . . . reasons, I know that they are good ones . . ."

"Oh, Dione!" he groaned, and in his turn dropped down his face into his hands.

"I . . ." said Dione, with both hands at her breast now, "I can bear my own sadness, but your sadness I cannot bear."

"And I," said Kent, "am a coward and a brute . . . and I have no right to love you . . . but I do love you."

"Oh," broke forth the girl on a sort of sob, "I knew it! . . . I knew it! . . . *Evoë* Pan!"

Kent stared at her. He thought for a dizzy in-

stant that she had really gone mad. But she turned on him such a radiant face, as she knelt before him on the heather with both arms uptossed, that he could only marvel at her in silence.

"Since that is true," she said, "nothing else matters . . . nothing else in all the world. . . . *Evoë*, *Evoë*, *Evoë* Pan!"

"Dione," said Kent, taking one of her uplifted hands for the first time, and drawing her down beside him, "do not cry so loudly. Some passer-by might hear you. What is it?" he added. "I do not understand at all."

Then close to him, yet not touching him, she told him of her pilgrimage by night to Pan's Mountain, and of the libation that she had poured and all the prayer that she had made.

Kent felt breathless, as though in some mad dream he were being made the sport of beautiful and terrible imaginings.

"You did that, Dione?" he said at last, "and you think—you really think that Pan sent me to you?"

"Yes . . . I think it," said Dione. "What do you think?"

"I think," said Kent, slowly, "that no one like you has lived on earth these two thousand years and more."

"But you will not be sad now?"

"Ah, you have forgotten those reasons of

which I spoke to you — those reasons that keep us apart, Dione . . . that must keep us apart."

"They will melt . . . vanish . . . like a vapour," she said, happily.

"They are as solid as the Stone of Iron there, now, Dione."

"They will pass," she said again. "They will open before us like the air. And then . . . do you remember the song of 'The Fierce Maiden'? And then you will say to me, 'Thou art mine.' And to you I will say, 'I am thine.'"

"O Dione, Dione, Dione!" was all that he could answer her.

CHAPTER XXVI

KENT was like a man who, handling carelessly a thread across his way, finds that it is a live wire from which he cannot loosen his grasp. He recalled an actual sight of this kind which he had once happened upon in Vienna, and the simile seemed more apt and just than ever. In that instance a poor devil, seeing a wire sagging before him, had taken hold of it to put it aside, and when Kent came upon the scene a small crowd was laughing at the grimaces and antics of the unfortunate wretch, whom they thought drunk. All the while, however, the man was not drunk but dead.

"Yes," thought Kent, grimly, "my mental squirmings and contortions must seem drunken indeed to the gods who look on in the figurative Vienna, and I know myself quite well as dead to all sense of honor. But I shall rise again . . . yes, I shall rise again, if not on the third day, then on the fourth, or fifth, or sixth . . . give me time, give me time. A woman who has just given birth to a child cannot get up and fight at once. And love has been torn from my side like

a child from a woman. . . . There is no health in me . . . I am sick to the marrow . . . I cannot fight—even the desire to fight is dead in me just now. . . . 'Her mate!' She prayed to Pan for her mate to be sent her—poor, lovely, fearless old-time Greek, born by mischance into this flat, twentieth century, where women avoid child-bearing, and divide their self-conscious loves into spiritual and physical hemispheres. 'Her mate' she asked for, pouring libation to Pan. . . . Has there ever been such a poem lived as that in this age of flying-machines and motor-cars? . . . 'And that their sons might be strong and wise.' . . . Dione . . . daughter of earth and sky, mother of Venus. . . . You are rightly named Dione! Dione! And though I was faithless, and did not pour libation to the fierce old gods, nor ask that you should be sent to me . . . you are my mate also. And shall I put you from me for a dull convention? . . . Shall I take 'my mate, my you,' and set her aside at the bidding of that pawky wench custom? Shall I give my ideal a bill of divorce? Shall I thrust her from my bed and board forever, and lay me down by the tepid side of propriety? God! You ask too much of man. You made him flesh, and require him to be spirit. Oh," groaned he, halting suddenly in his savage circlings about his room, "what is the use of all this bombast? . . . She has taken me for her mate because she believes me to be a

man. And like a man I must act to her, not like a brute beast . . . not 'like the mule which hath no understanding and taketh the bit in his jaws.' . . . But give me time, give me time . . ."

And throwing himself down upon his bed he buried his face in his arms, and lay there, gazing upon Dione against the spangled darkness of his eyelids as though she had been actually present. Complete and rounded as her strong young body, he saw with his mind's eye her nature also. Lover and mother in one . . . no broken arc, but the perfect round, here on earth. Her mate she desired and his children she desired also. And the beautiful flesh of her was afire with imagination. And out of her grave eyes looked mind and character, as well as love, and all the dizzying promises of woman to the chosen from among men. There was something about her as spacious and tender as the blue lift in summer. And though he felt that this figurative heaven could lighten and thunder also, it seemed to him only the more desirable for its possibility of storm. Again she was like the dark earth, her mother, with something of fatefulness and mystery hidden under all the burgeoning sweetness. That, too, he loved.

She had in her the primeval force of air, of fire, of water; would be as bright and dangerous to mishandle as a sword of flame.

"Yes, my mate, my mate, my mate. And

shall I give you up? No, by God!" he cried, springing to his feet. "Somehow, sometime, somewhere . . . I shall win you . . . I shall take you . . . I shall have and hold you forever!"

When he next saw Dione, which was on the afternoon following, he tried to make clear to her as best he could, without telling her what he could not yet bring himself to tell her, why he must not see her too often.

She listened seriously, with eyes sometimes downcast, sometimes fastened on his.

"Do you understand?" he asked at last, when he had finished. "Do you understand, Dione . . . my love, my dearest? Do you realize that it is a torture for me to sit near you like this, and yet not to touch so much as your beautiful hand? . . . That I am like a man dying of thirst who must strike the full cup from his own lips? I am brave enough to say 'I dare not.' . . . Do you understand what that means, Dione? . . . Do you? Do you?"

"I understand," said she, "that you have strong reasons. And as I trust you wholly I know those reasons to be good ones. And since we love each other what is a little waiting? . . . It is hard, yes. But one has to pay for all things. The greater the love the bigger the price. That is all, is it not? We can help each other during this waiting by trusting each other."

Kent felt all his being shake to its roots. He turned away so that she could not see his face—and the girl stood quietly beside him and said nothing for some moments. Then she asked:

"But you will come sometimes and give me the lessons in fencing, will you not?"

"Yes," he said.

"And we can swim together now and then?"

"Yes, Dione."

"And sometimes I may sail with you?"

"Yes . . . we will take Cecca."

"It seems a pity," said Dione, thoughtfully, "she is so afraid. And I need not sit near you. I could sit on deck, near the mast, with Masciett."

"Oh, my dear!" said Kent, and hid his face upon her sleeve. The next instant he had her on his breast, holding her as against a world in arms. As suddenly he let her go. They stood looking at each other whitely.

"You see . . . you see . . ." he stammered.

"Yes . . ." said Dione, trembling a little. "I see . . . I will be good . . . I will not . . ." she paused, and pushed back her clinging hair, and her full throat quivered like a child's after sobbing. "I will not . . . ask to sail with you . . . any more," she ended in a whisper.

He kept faith with himself and her, was true to his word, and came only every two or three

days to give her a lesson in fencing. As he had foreseen, she made a remarkable pupil, and she was a delight to look at in her short kirtle and blouse, with beautiful slim legs uncovered to the knees, and pliant feet that grasped the earth like a boy's. Gravely they would salute each other, sword over head, in one of the most perfect poses known to the human body, and then for an hour there would be only the click of steel between them, and the necessary words of question and instruction. But her heart sang all the while, "My beloved is mine and I am his," and all the while he was saying to himself, in the words of poor Keats, "'I wish I was either in your arms . . . or that a thunderbolt would strike me.'"

This lasted for ten days. Then one evening Dione said to Cecca:

"Cecca *mia*, I have something to tell you which I would tell to no one else in the world."

And Cecca said:

"Tell on, Tesoro *mio*. You know well that I am a tomb for secrets."

"Dear tomb!" said Dione, flinging an arm about her neck and pressing a fresh cheek to hers, "this is a secret indeed."

"I listen, my joy," said Cecca.

"It is this," said Dione, pressing close to her. "The Signore Kent and I love each other, and will be married some day."

"*Viva Dio!* Bring forth men children only!"

cried Cecca, in the words of Macbeth, though she said them in dialect. "*Figli maschi!* The Virgin has prospered it! A fine pair you will make, treasure of my heart. And you who are always wishing for a son. Eh! What a son there will be of that mating!"

"Yes," said Dione, "we shall have splendid sons. But that is enough of that, Cecca *mia*. What I want now is that you should come down to the *osteria* with me and sit on the shore while I go for a short swim with the Signore. We will not swim far, and no harm can be said if you are there. And mamma is in Pallanza for the evening, and soon the moon will be coming up over the Sasso. And I want to see it rise with him, from the water."

"It seems to me that you have as many reasons as wishes," said Cecca, a little grumblingly. "However, as you two are going to marry, there would be no harm in it, I suppose. When does the Signore speak to *la* mamma?"

"I do not wish him to speak yet," said Dione. "I wish our secret to be just our own for some time longer."

"Not for too long, Gioia," said her nurse, with a certain note of anxiety in her voice.

"No, not for too long; for only as long as I wish."

"Long waitings are not good for man and maid," said Cecca, firmly. "It seems to me that you are doing a foolishness."

"No," said Dione, as firmly, "I am not doing a foolishness. Of that you may be quite sure."

And with this Cecca had to content herself.

She sat with her knitting on the shore, and watched while Kent and Dione went forward into the starlit water. "Madonna guard her! St. Joseph punish him if he be not good to her!" said she, in her heart.

They swam, at first, through soft, gray reaches, touched here and there by flecks from the clear stars; then, all at once, that quickening glow began to spread behind Pan's Mountain. The moon was coming slowly, delicately up, like a tired queen from her pleasure.

Kent looked at the little, drenched head beside him, with its thrice-wound snood of black ribbon. The water parted in a gleaming thread of silver about her throat, on its silver edge her round chin rested lightly. Strongly, rhythmically, her white arms cleaved a way, stroke for stroke with him.

"Dione," he said.

"Well?"

"How long could you swim with me like this?"

"Until we sank together."

"Would you rather sink with me than go back without me?"

"You know."

"If we sank together now we should be saved great pain, Dione."

"I will bear great pain for you willingly."

They swam on in silence.

The moon's rim peered all at once, deep as coral.

"See!" said Dione. "She is like a flower—all rosy."

"No, she is blushing . . . love makes her rosy. She has just come up out of Endymion's cave."

"But presently Pan will frighten her. Then she will grow pale again."

"Dione . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"I would you were the Lady Diana and I the shepherd of Latmos, and that you were rosy like the moon."

"Let us swim to Latmos."

"Alas! I fear that your geography is at fault, Dione."

"But all waters touch all shores in dreams."

"Then let us swim to Latmos."

"Come, then, Endymion."

Now the moon hung clear before them. Pan had alarmed her, and she was pale indeed. They swam along her silver trail toward the shadow of his mountain.

"See," said Dione, "it leads straight to the grotto where I poured him libation and asked him to send you to me."

"Let us go there together and make thank-offering."

"Not to-night; it is much too far to swim, but some time, yes, we will go there together. Let us float for a while now."

They floated side by side, gazing up into the vast splendor above them.

"This it is to be in the hollow of God's hand," said Kent at last.

"There is no world any more," said Dione, dreamily; "it has dropped away from us . . . there is only space and love about us."

"Is not that enough?"

"It is enough," said Dione.

They swam again for a while, this time to a little inlet about twenty yards from where Cecca sat with her knitting, and rested on the dry grasses. The night was very hot. The cicadas piped faintly as though in sleep.

"Dione," said Kent, suddenly, "tell me this. . . . Would you refuse to live out your life with a man whom you loved if he could not marry you after the formal custom of the world? If there were some deadly bar to it? And if he loved you with all his soul and body, and meant to be truly your husband as long as he lived? Would you send him from you? . . . Would you wreck him just for that?"

"If I thought only of myself . . . no, I would not leave him," answered Dione. "But as I

said once, it is the children one must think of . . . one must not wrong one's unborn children. . . . To bring them into the world without a name or place . . . that would be a black wrong. . . . That is the worst wrong that I can think of."

"But to be born of a great love, is not that more than any name? Then are men and women truly poets, 'makers' . . . when they create a child out of a mighty love."

"You have your name," said Dione, "and you have made it famous. . . . You cannot judge."

"Before God, I would rather be born of a great love than inherit a great name."

"You think so," said Dione, "because you have the great name already. But if men had the right to call you 'bastard' . . . then all would seem different to you."

"Do you think a woman could ever hate the man whom she had once loved with all her self?"

"If he wronged her child I think she might hate him. Do you not remember the 'Fierce Maiden'? It was for that which 'cried beneath her heart without a voice,' . . . for her unborn child that he had wronged, that she killed her lover. You remember, do you not?"

"Could you kill one whom you had loved, for any reason?"

"I might wish to kill him . . . I might even go mad for a little while and really kill him.

How do I know? . . . You make my heart very heavy with these strange questions."

"Oh, my dear! forgive me. . . . My heart is very heavy, too."

"Think only of our love . . . then your heart will not be heavy any longer."

"My life. . . . My heart's blood."

"Yes, my life is in you, and yours in me. The breath that we breathe with is one breath. And now we must go back."

"Dream of me. . . . Come into my dreams, Dione," said Kent, passionately, as they parted for the night. "Even sleep without you is intolerable."

"If I can, oh, be very sure that I will come, my one, life's love!" she answered, with both hands against her breast.

CHAPTER XXVII

VARONI returned the next day, and the day after asked Dione to be his wife. She refused gently, with deep feeling, for his earnest and immovable love was revealed to her clearly in that short half hour; besides, her own love had already made her much softer in many ways.

"Signorina," said he, very pale but very quiet, "you will pardon me, I know, for reminding you that you are still very young . . . I mention it only because I wish to say that in time you may change—while with me change is impossible. Should that day ever come, Signorina, I shall be there, always the same . . . always waiting."

Then he went to see Kent.

"Alareec," he said, with the same quietness, "it has happened as you foresaw. The Signorina Rupin has refused me—and yet . . ." he broke off, looking at the other keenly, "I think that I may say without egotism that I could have taught her to love me had she only trusted herself to my keeping."

"Can love ever be 'taught'?" asked Kent, not returning his look, but gazing down at the silver

pencil with which he had been working when his friend entered.

"Not all kinds of love, perhaps," said Varoni, "but a very steadfast, beautiful affection may be won by the man who sets his whole life to the task . . . as I would have set mine. Of that I am sure. And perhaps . . . in the end . . . such a love is better than the blaze of passion with which most loves begin." He seemed to await Kent's reply.

"My dear Gigino," answered the other, moodily, "not one of us knows the first damn thing about love, after all. And I can't help thinking that if a woman does not love a man to begin with, it is a very fortunate thing for them both if she will not marry him."

Varoni was silent for a few moments. He took one of Kent's battered little note-books, and began playing with it as Kent was playing with the pencil.

All at once he said:

"Forgive me, Alareec, if I mention something that I mentioned once before. But to me there is a certain change about the Signorina . . . something very subtle, very evasive. . . . Alareec . . . do you remember my once asking you to be very careful with that young girl?"

"I do," said Kent, curtly.

"Well, then . . . I ask it again . . . most earnestly, unless . . ." He fixed so shrewd a

gaze on him this time that Kent feared his color would change. "Unless," continued Varoni, "you are beginning to care for her yourself?"

Kent jumped up, and went to the open window.

"You are simply a monomaniac, Gigino," said he, with his face toward the lake.

"Because if that is the case," Varoni went on, with his gentle imperturbability, "I have nothing more to say . . . except that my every wish for good is with you both. But . . ." he broke off again, and looked at his friend more shrewdly than ever.

"Why do you not look at me, Alarecc?" he asked, leaving his sentence unfinished.

"Good Lord!" cried Kent, as crossly as a child, "you break in on a man when he's in the middle of the most devilish snarl of work, and then criticise his attitude toward you! I must say, Gigino, you can be jolly trying when you put your mind to it."

"Do you intend asking her to marry you?" was Varoni's reply to this outburst.

"My good man," said Kent, as pale now as the other, "I have no intention, at present, of asking any woman in the world to marry me; that you may take my word for."

"You seem to me to be very unnecessarily excited," returned Varoni, with the fly-like persistency which was so exasperating at times.

"I *am* excited. I confess to the crime frankly. Perhaps you'd be excited occasionally, also, if you were trying to steer the Monna Lisa through a five-act drama without being either inconsistent or monotonous—and with interruptions from every quarter," he ended, growling.

Varoni came over and put both small, well-cut hands on his friend's sulky shoulders.

"It's no use, Alareec," said he. "I know you too well. You are disturbed far more than by any paper-lady like your Monna Lisa. . . . Now hear me. If you love this young girl and wish to marry her . . . on some future day . . . next year . . . when you will . . . all is well between us. But should you, by any carelessness or selfishness whatever, . . . make her suffer . . ." (the small hands held Kent firmly) . . . "why then, Alareec, our friendship would break as the friendships of other good friends have broken many a time before now. . . . That is all . . . I wished to be quite frank."

"You have certainly been frank," said Kent, dryly. It was with difficulty that he kept himself from scowling.

"And now," said Varoni, "I will say good-bye. I am sorry to have irritated you, for, as you know well, I have a great affection for you. But I also know the creative temperament . . . I wanted to warn you, and I wanted all to be straight and clear before us. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Gigino," said Kent, softening, and giving the small hand a tight grip. "You're really the best chap in the world, you know, after all."

Madame Rupin gave Dione a rather bad quarter of an hour after the final departure of the Varonis, but, as usual, was glad to escape with a few bitter whinings from her daughter's impassive dignity. Cecca, also, came to the rescue with a few words as wingedly crafty as those of Odysseus.

"*Madonna mia!*" exclaimed she, "are you fretting because better remains and less good goes? . . . Have you not yourself told me that the *Inglese* is a great *Scior* in his own country, and rich to boot? . . . And do you not know that the *Inglesi* are not like our *Sciori* in these matters, but require much time and patience, and a long tether? And as for your grandsons, will they not be better tall and strapping like the *Inglese*, instead of little and girlish like the other? Now powder your pretty nose and go sit on the terrace in the good air which always blows wisdom into hot heads, and I will beat you up an egg with some Marsala, for your little stomach must be empty since you have poured forth so many words and groanings."

In the mean time Kent was fighting, not a good, perhaps, but certainly a bitter fight.

He spent harassed nights, and dark, confused days.

"Tell her . . . tell her . . ." urged one voice. "Wait . . ." urged the other. "Why precipitate matters? . . . Who knows what an hour or a day may bring forth? . . . Perhaps to-morrow . . . to-night even, that grim barrier may open before you as she said, 'like the air.' Such things happen. . . . In all lives gates of brass have been broken in pieces, and iron bars cut asunder. . . . Does not all come to him who knows how to wait? . . ."

And he stifled the first voice and listened to the second. But his work lay neglected in a drawer, and it was during this period that he wrote those feverish yet beautiful lyrics "To Dione," which are as the voice of one singing to a strange woman songs of an unforgotten love.

One morning, however, when he awoke, it was as if he had consulted with a great Master in the night. All seemed clear before him. His will bent to his grasp like a ready bow.

"To-day," said he, with mind and body strung, "to-day I will tell her . . . and it will lay with her as to what happens after."

Still in this frame of mind he went to Vareggio to give Dione the usual fencing lesson.

She met him with a face as radiant as though she had spent her night in the field of stars.

"Did you see me last night?" she asked, coming close and smiling up at him. "I was with you in, oh! such beautiful places. . . . We spent a hundred years together, and it seemed like a heartbeat. . . ."

"Were you happy?" said Kent, in a low voice.

"Oh, my most dearest!"

She laughed her low, stirring laugh.

"Did you see me? . . . Did you see me?" she asked again.

"I felt you if I did not see you, Dione," said he. "There is not a beat of my blood that does not thrill with you."

"Ah, . . . but I hoped you had seen me! . . . You were so real . . . I touched your hair . . . your eyes. . . . You took me to you. . . . You said . . . 'Dione . . . you are mine at last. . . . Those reasons have melted like a mist. . . .' And all was happy with us. . . . The whole world was happy with our happiness."

Kent stood gazing at her out of a pale face. Then he said, in a voice still lower:

"Let us take our lesson first, Dione. . . . Afterward I . . . have something to tell you."

"As you please," said she, radiantly. "I hope it will be to confess that you saw me, too!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

KENT handed her a foil. Yielding to her insistence, he was going to give her her first lesson in lunging. He had not thought when he began teaching her that she could make such rapid progress as to begin lunging after only eight or nine lessons. But already she could step backward and forward tense on her bent knees, in the correct position, her body well in profile, her left arm and hand curled over her shoulder, her right arm extended forward with elbow slightly bent.

He was right in thinking her extraordinarily supple, with an enduring elasticity of limb that he ascribed to her mountain walks; but he did not know how long she had practised stepping backward and forward before her mirror, which allowed her to correct any deflection from the right attitude.

He really had no objection to make against this first lesson in lunging, which she suddenly urged upon him, except that of having left his padded coat in his room, and this seemed so trivial a reason that he kept it to himself. After

all, he could parry a far swifter thrust than she could yet give.

"Now, then, you try," he said, after he had thrust at an imaginary adversary by way of example.

Dione obeyed.

"*Brava!* Now recover yourself . . . back on your left leg, quick!"

He watched her, then remarked:

"Your left leg must act as a spring not only to send you forward but to draw you back again. . . . Like this. . . . Do you see? Now try again."

This time, instead of standing aside, he faced her, foil in hand, ready to parry, and pointing to his left breast with his free hand.

"Feel the point of your foil . . . feel it as if you had it between your fingers. You must feel it as a painter feels the end of his brush. Then don't *fall* forward, *spring* forward from your left leg. Ready? . . . Now!"

He did not have to parry, for the point of her foil went altogether wide of him.

"How vexing!" she said, breathing fast.

"Not at all. You are doing very well. You were much better on your legs this time."

"Yes, but I missed you by a yard!"

"Never mind. I'd rather have you miss me in the right way than touch me in the wrong way. You would only have done it by accident then."

Without a word she fell into position again, tapped the floor lightly with her right foot to prove to herself and to him that her weight was all on her left leg, then sprang.

"Better! Much better! . . . Do you see?" he encouraged her, after she had retreated into position, and stood breathing still faster, her face slightly flushed.

She looked at him with bright and darkened eyes.

"No . . . it isn't better. . . . Don't treat me like a child that has to be humoured. I am dreadfully clumsy."

"You are too impatient. I swear you are doing as well as a man would."

Again she did not answer. It was not in her nature to make excuses for herself, but she would *not* be clumsy! She would show him that she did not need his indulgence.

Once more she got into position, every fibre tense with will, her eyes straight in his and black with rebellion at her own deficiency.

In him, the attention of the fencing-master gave way for a moment to the admiration of the man. And then . . . did she spring too far to keep her balance? or did she slip? or was he off his guard? . . . The point of her foil caught in his loose collar, bent, then snapped short, the stump tearing through collar and skin over his shoulder; her body followed it, checked only by

his from a hard fall. And then she saw that there was blood upon his throat . . . that he was very pale.

In an instant her foil dropped, clinking. Both her arms were fast about him, her head strained back, her young breast pressed to his—all herself pressed against him, as though she would melt into him and so make that flowing blood her blood also that was shed.

"Oh!" she said, with a great cry. "Oh! . . . I have hurt you! . . . I cannot bear it! . . . I have hurt you! I have hurt you!"

And she clutched him as the drowning clutch, and held up her face to his, shuddering through all her frame.

Kent's brain reeled; the world reeled with it. The past, the future were gulfed in this whirling now. He felt only the woman on his breast—the wine of life at his lips, and, stooping his head, he drank and drank. . . .

When he could speak at all, he said, whispering:

"Now you are mine? . . . Dione . . . are you not mine now?"

She lay in his arms with her face hidden, but he felt the assenting movements of her head against his breast.

"You are mine. . . . You are my wife. . . . Say it. . . ."

"I am all yours. . . . I am your wife. . . ."

"Could priests make you more my wife? . . . Could any words of man?"

"No. . . . No. . . ."

"Dione . . ." his voice was only a warm breath in her ear.

"Yes. . . ."

"I cannot marry you before men now. But some day. . . . Do you hear me, Dione?"

The dark head made that little assenting, thrilling movement.

"Some day I will marry you in the eyes of the whole world. . . . By God, I will! . . . With my own hands I will break the iron bars. . . . I can . . . I will. . . . Do you hear me?"

Her hand moved on his shoulder, against his throat, answering for her, assuring, talking, as only the hand of the woman who loves can talk without words.

How long they stayed thus, fast in each other's arms, neither knew.

At last Dione said, whisperingly:

"Let us go to-night to Pan's Mountain and swear it upon his altar."

He caught her still closer.

"Swear what, Dione? . . . Our real marriage vows?"

"Yes," she whispered.

All that afternoon the *mareng* swept the sky with strange whimsies, as of a pregnant witch. Now high, now low it sped, whirling up great

vortices of cloud from behind the Sasso di Ferro, flinging black mist-wreaths against the scudding white, tearing them again with angry teeth. . . . Anon trundling huge saffron balls of *cumuli* above Luino, only to beat them flat with a green broom of wind. Scattering, gathering, scattering again — now east, now west, now north, now south, in a sick frenzy of unfocussed force.

Yes, the witch-wind was abroad in all her might, and the slight gusts of rain were like the spitting of her teased and bewildered cat, tossed with her through the sky.

Toward eight o'clock the fury had spent herself, but the clouds still gathered, sagged lower and lower, gray like ashes, like fur, like metal, like the flesh of the dying, like the eyes of a dead man. . . .

Kent and Dione rowed to Pan's Mountain under a low, smothering tent, which on every side closed in about them.

"Look," said Dione, speaking softly. "Pan is veiling himself. He is putting on his priestly robes. . . ."

And, glancing over his shoulder, Kent saw, in the eerie light that failed with every instant, a vast cope of mist, descending almost to the mountain's foot.

He rested on his oars for a moment to watch that stately robing. Then he said:

"What shall we do when we get there? . . . What shall we say?"

Dione crept forward in the boat, and leaned against his breast. She drew down his head and whispered in his ear:

"We shall pour the wine into my little silver cup. . . . Then we shall each drink of it. . . . Then each will pour libation to him. . . . And you will say: '*Evoë*, Pan! I take this woman to be my wife.' . . . And I will say: '*Evoë*, Pan! I take this man to be my husband.' . . ."

"Dione. . . . Dione. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Only that. . . . 'Dione.' . . . It is all said in that one word. . . ."

It was almost pit mirk when they reached the mountain. Dione took the oars from him, and guided the boat among the sunken crags. Then she got out and made the painter fast, as when she had come before. Kent came and stood beside her. They grasped each other's hands hard, like children in a strange darkness. There was no sound of any kind save that hollow "glucking" of the water in the low caverns to right and left of them.

"This is a gruesome place . . ." said Kent, finally. . . . "Let us get through and be gone from it. . . ."

He heard the wine pouring into the little cup, but could not see its dark red against the gloom.

"Drink, . . ." said Dione's soft voice at his ear. . . . "I have drunk of it already." She held the rim against his mouth, and he drank, feeling a strange shiver as the wine flowed down his throat.

"Now," said she, "do you make libation."

"*Evoë*, Pan!" said Kent, in an unsteady voice, and again that shiver passed over him as he heard the plash of the wine upon the bare rock at his feet. "I take this woman to be my wife. . . ."

"*Evoë*, Pan!" the girl said, clearly, and he heard the soft plash again. "I take this man to be my husband. . . ."

Then, as it seemed, they stood waiting, and unconsciously they held their breaths.

But only an august and darkling silence answered them.

As they turned to go, however, a pelt of little stones fell rattling through the shadows, with a noise like laughing. They fell hard and straight.

"Come! . . ." cried Kent, in a strange voice. "Come quickly! . . . Give me your hand! . . . Quick! Quick! . . ."

He half dragged, half lifted her into the boat.

"Were you hurt? . . . Did any strike you?" he asked, bending low to the oars, and sending the little *Am-pias-a-mi* like a shell through the livid water.

A moon-streak through a tear in the smothering tent showed him Dione's face, very white.

"Ah, I knew it!" he cried, an instant later, leaving the oars and flinging himself on his knees before her. "Dione! . . . You're bleeding! . . ."

"One struck my breast. . . . It does not hurt now," said Dione, in a low voice.

That tear in the tent of clouds was widening. They saw each other's white faces in the wan gleam, like the faces of two drowned people through the sickly underlight of water.

"It does not hurt now . . . truly," said Dione again.

She showed him a little cut on the white lift of her breast just at the edge of her gown, from which some drops of blood were oozing.

"Poor, lovely breast," said Kent, and, bending, stanched it with his lips.

"See . . ." he whispered, lifting his head. "I am sealed to you. . . . See your blood upon my lips."

Dione trembled, but kept her eyes in his.

When they reached the other shore again and were once more among the mountain wildnesses, he stopped suddenly and turned to her.

"Are you really all mine . . . at last?" he said, in a pent and shaken voice.

Dione opened wide her arms with a noble gesture.

"Take me . . . I am yours, not mine," she said.

CHAPTER XXIX

DURING the middle of September Kent was called to England by the illness of his mother. This illness ended unexpectedly in her death, and he did not return to Ceredo until the 16th of January.

Madame Rupin had set up a dreary wailing when he left.

"There, . . . stupid one! . . ." she had cried to Dione, "there goes the other of two miraculous chances that the Virgin sent you! . . . One would think that you were waiting for the little Crown Prince to grow up that you might be Queen of Italy. . . . The saints pity me! . . . I have brought an Amazon into the world. . . ."

"Do not be distressed, mamma," the girl had replied, with unusual softness. "I think that, when he returns, the Signor Kent will ask you to allow him to marry me."

"'When he returns! . . . When he returns!' God give me patience! Yes . . . *when* he returns all will be well indeed!"

"Surely," here Cecca had put in, "you waste good breath on poor words, Sciora *mia*. . . .

Does a man write every day, and sometimes twice a day, to one whom he does not wish to see again? . . . Like the swallows to the south, he will be heading straight for our lake ere the winter sets in."

And Dione, listening, had smiled and said:

"Yes, surely he will return before long. In his last letter he tells me so. . . . I pray you not to worry, mamma."

She smiled very often for her in these days; even in her light, half-conscious sleep she smiled, and though this smile of hers was all unlike the Monna Lisa's, it was even more subtle.

The day on which Kent came back was cold and fiercely bright, with the Maggiore hammering the lake to a floor of rough blue steel. He caught his breath as he looked about him. It was like seeing a beautiful woman after a lapse of twenty years . . . so changed was the whole scene, and yet so unmistakably the same. Pan's Mountain was now the real Stone of Iron, with blue-black metallic ribs jutting against a sky of piercing azure. The hazel bushes had all shed their leaves. Above Ghiffa the chestnuts and birches and poplars were all naked. Only the oaks thrust forth a banner of withered russet here and there, while the dark pines and cypresses stared from among the tangle of stripped branches, as with the haughty gloom of beings by whom the seasons pass unheeded.

He went straight to his lodgings, and found there, as he had expected, a note from Dione awaiting him.

He did not stop to take off his heavy overcoat, but tore the letter open, and read it standing.

"Come, thou more than my heart's blood," it said. "Come to me in the little pavilion where my foot slipped that day. . . . Dost thou remember? Ah, thou dost well remember! . . . For was not that the morning of the first day for us? The day on which we first began to live indeed. The day on which we married each other before the altar of Pan. . . . Come quick! . . . quick! for I have beautiful things to tell thee which may not wait. . . ."

Kent kissed the paper like a boy hungry with first love. In ten minutes he was at the door of the pavilion.

Dione opened it herself. Behind her was the glow of a great wood fire which she had kindled on the hearth. She looked very tall and extraordinarily alive, as though lit by some inner flame brighter than the fire, and, somehow, while she was more herself than ever, yet, like the landscape, she had changed. It was not winter, though, that had touched her—she was like a garden of red roses in the heart of June.

They clung together as though Death, relenting, had just given them back to each other.

"Dione! . . . Dione! . . . Dione! . . ." was all

that Kent could say, as on many another meeting, while for Dione, her quick hands spoke, flashing about him, like birds about their nest, over his hair, his eyes, his throat, his lips.

"My love . . . my wife, . . ." he stammered. "My wife . . . . my own. . . ."

Then after a throbbing half hour of broken words and tremulous caresses, Dione laid her arm about his neck, and pressed down her face above his heart.

"Alaric," said she, "you have not asked me to tell you those beautiful things. . . ."

"Oh, my most beautiful," said Kent, dizzy with the fulness of love and life. "Are not all the things that you tell me only less beautiful than you are?"

"But this is more beautiful than I am. . . ."

He laughed softly against her fragrant hair.

"With permission," said he, "I must beg leave to doubt it."

She put up one hand and covered his laughing lips.

"You must not laugh," she said; "this is to be heard in silence . . . with a prayer."

"Tell me, then," he answered. "I shall be praying in my heart the while that we may never die."

Then Dione, holding his hand against her heart, and whispering, said:

"Alaric, there is to be given us . . . a little son."

When, after some seconds, he had not answered her, she turned in his arms and looked up into his face. It was the face of a man who had died in pain.

"Alaric! . . . Alaric! . . ." screamed Dione, and she shook him to and fro in her terror. Then she screamed again as he tilted stiffly against her. For a moment he had lost all consciousness. . . . She wrapped him about with her arms as a mother wraps a hurt child. . . . She kissed him upon the mouth . . . desperately, with jealous fierceness, as though she would give him her very life-breath to breathe with. . . . She did all the wild, frantic, hindering things that ignorant people do to one in a swoon. And when at last he drew a catching breath and his eyelids flickered, for the first time in her life—for she had not wept when her father died, though she loved him —she burst into such an anguish of tears as Eve might have shed when she stumbled over the body of Abel.

Little by little Kent came to himself again, but that frozen look as of a mask never left his face. He stared before him, not moving, not speaking, heedless of her racking sobs, as she leaned against him with her arms flung out across his knees.

At last he managed to utter "Dione! . . ."

"Oh!" she cried, gathering him all against her breast. "I thought that you were dead! . . . I thought that you were dead!"

"Oh, that I could die!" groaned the man.

Then he sat up and put her from him.

"Don't touch me, . . . Dione," he said, in a thick, hoarse voice, "until . . ."

He broke off, and hid his face upon his clenched fists.

"Tell me! . . . tell me! . . ." urged the girl. "Something will snap in my heart if I am not told quickly!"

"O God! . . ." said Kent. "O God, God, God! . . ."

"Tell me! . . ." urged Dione, fiercely. "Tell me! . . . tell me! . . ."

She tried to drag up his face from his hands, so that she might look at it. But he resisted.

"Tell me! . . ." she said again. "If you are going to kill me, . . . why, kill me quickly."

"Dione! . . ." said Kent, with the effort of one dying to utter a few vital words. "Dione, . . . will you curse me? . . . Will you? . . . I can't do it!" he cried, and broke off again.

The girl, rigid and trembling now from head to foot, said:

"You are being very cruel to me. . . ."

"Then," said Kent, with a sort of desperate rage in his spent voice—"then I will be crueler still. . . . I cannot marry you before the world

even now . . . after . . . what . . . you have told me, because . . ." he set his teeth so hard together that she heard their grating . . . "because . . . I . . . am married . . . already . . ."

There fell utter silence between them. Like a corpse it fell—heavily—and lay between them. When at last, unable to bear the strain of that dreadful hush any longer, Kent lifted his head and looked at her, he would scarcely have known her. Her eyes had grown light in color like ashes. Her mouth was like a white scar on her face. She looked witless, and there was a horror in her empty stare as of some bewitched creature whose lover's lips had turned to snakes beneath her kiss.

Kent seized her in his arms, called her by name, prayed to her as though she had been God. She was like a shape of stone. Then all the man in him went to water. He dropped down his head upon her knees and his weeping shook her body.

"God forgive me! . . . God forgive me! . . ." he kept saying, when he could speak.

"God will not forgive you," said a curious, light voice above his head.

He looked up in terror. The sight of her face terrified him still more. She was gazing straight down at him now.

"For Christ's sake, Dione, . . . do not look at me in that horrible way! . . ."

"I must look at you . . . I never saw you before. . . ."

"Dione! . . . Your eyes kill! . . ."

"No, . . . or you would be dead. . . ."

"Is it to me . . . *me* . . . that you speak, . . . Dione?"

"I would kill you if I could . . . I do not know how."

He felt his blood chilling. Then he cried out to her:

"Dione! . . . Where are you? . . . Come back! . . . . Come back! . . ."

"Diana knew," said she. "She set his hounds on Acteon at the first. . . ."

"But she did not love him! . . . Dione, Dione! . . . Are you going mad . . . here . . . before my eyes? . . . Wake! . . . Wake! . . ."

"And I do not love you, either."

Kent struggled to his feet and groped his way to the window. The short winter day was drawing to its close. A dull glow as of red-hot iron, cooling, lit the sky above Baveno. The garden lay in dark coils of vines and the matted white of its dead grasses. Behind him, in the dead-still room, a log broke into flame, and the light from it rippled over the pane through which he was gazing. Then he went back to her. He took her rigid hands in his and held them firmly.

"Listen, Dione, . . ." he said, in a more natural voice, "I have been a madman, but I am not all

the scoundrel you think me. . . . My life is yours and . . . and our child's. . . . My name shall be yours the instant I am free. . . . No shame nor harm shall come to you. . . . I will take you far, far from here. . . . Every pulse of my heart . . . every thought of my brain . . . every atom of me, soul and body, shall be yours always . . . as it has been from the first moment that I loved you. . . . Are you listening? . . . Do you understand me?"

Her hard, deathly eyes never left his face. When he paused, she said:

"And my son. . . . What of my son? . . ."

"Will he not be my son, too? . . . Is he not mixed of our love? . . . Have I no claim in him?"

"Will you call him 'Bastard' . . . when you want him to come to you to be loved?"

"Dione! . . ."

"Will you say 'Love me, little bastard, . . . for I gave thee that good name'?"

"God in heaven! . . . She is really mad! . . ." He stared at her, stricken.

". . . And when he grows to be a man . . . and comes to you with the woman he loves for . . . for your blessing . . ." She laughed. ". . . . Will you say to her: 'My blessing is that men will call you the Lady Bastard.' . . . Will you say that to her?"

That numbness which comes when the height

of pain or joy is reached began to steal over Kent.

"Perhaps I had better go now," he said, heavily. "When you have slept . . . to-morrow . . . I will come again, and . . ."

"'When I have slept!' . . ." she echoed him, and her light eyes had a dreadful sneer in them. "I will not sleep," she said, "until you have had your punishment. . . ."

Kent shuddered.

"I will do whatever you wish," he said, with painful humility. "But you are very cruel in your turn, Dione. . . . You have not even let me tell you my sordid story. . . ."

"I am not in the mood for fireside tales to-night," said Dione.

"I was so young . . . only a lad, . . ." he faltered. "It was when I was at college. . . . She . . ."

"Silence!" said Dione. "I have nothing to do with any one in all the world but you and me."

". . . Dione! . . . Where are you? . . . Who is this in your place?" he called out again, in desperate anguish. "You speak of my punishment. . . . God did not punish Cain as you are punishing me. . . ."

"Cain only murdered his brother. . . . You have killed your first-born before he has drawn breath. . . . Better be Cain even than . . . bastard."

"Did you ever love me, . . . Dione?"

"No . . . I never loved you, . . . for I never saw you until to-day."

Kent gave the piteous sigh of a man who is coming to himself after prolonged torture.

"Must I . . . go . . . now? . . ."

"Go . . . but I will see you again. . . ."

"When? . . ." he faltered.

"When the right time comes."

"And . . . I must go . . . like this?"

"Go as you can and may," she said.

"Then . . . good-night, Dione."

"There is no night that is good . . . but one may be made good."

He felt his way out, blindly. In the door he turned.

She made no sign. He passed on into the clear night. Above Pan's Mountain the moon just showed her rim. It was coral-red, as though, stealing up from Endymion's cave, she blushed for love.

CHAPTER XXX

ALL that night Dione sat at her window and gazed at the Stone of Iron. Masciett lay at her feet and kept them warm, though she did not know it. She was not conscious of her body. All her life seemed to have drawn upward into her head. It seemed to her that the whole world was beating in that conscious round, and that she knew things and yet was apart from them. . . . She felt light as a feather . . . as a feather torn from the breast of a hawk in some mid-air fray . . . floating . . . floating. Though there be blood upon it, the feather cannot feel it. . . . So she bled, and knew it, but did not feel it.

And all during the long night the refrain of the old folk-song went singing, in her own voice, through her brain:

"*The ashes on my hearth are red, but not with fire.*"

There were ashes, too, in her brain, but these were red with fire. . . . She touched her forehead lightly . . . then looked at her hand in the moonlight. . . . It should have been scarred with that hot fire in her head.

Then as she gazed down at it, thinking this, she said to herself:

"That is a foolish thought. . . . Thus people go mad . . . I will not go mad, for I have things that I must do with reason and calmness. . . . There is no real fire in my head. . . ."

She touched it again with her cold hand.

"Yet how it burns! . . ." she said.

Then she bent her eyes again on the Stone of Iron.

"I have seen you naked, Pan," she said aloud.

She gazed and gazed, then she said again:

"Those of old who saw you so . . . died. But I shall not die . . . not yet."

The old folk-songs that her father had taught her when a child kept thronging back upon her. One came now, more persistently than the song of the "Fierce Maiden"—alternated with it, beating itself out in scraps and reiterations against her strained mind:

'Why are thy long black tresses always dripping, O maiden?
My hair is wet with my tears and the water that drowned
my lover.'

. . . .

In anger they parted. The heavens also were wrathful.
Dark was the lake, but darker their hearts within them.
The lover went to his fishing: the maid to her spinning.
Drowned in the storm was he. Her reason went with him.

. . . .

Now, folks say, she wanders by night to meet him.
Under the waves, hand in hand, all the long night-tide

They fare together (thus say the old folks).
The fishes go through their hair and against their pale faces.
Cold as that touch are the kisses they give each other.
(The old folks tell it.)

. . . .

'Why are thy long black tresses always dripping, O maiden?
My hair is wet with my tears and the water that drowned my lover.'

The next day she wrote a few words to Kent and sent them by Cecca.

"I will see you again," she wrote, "but do not come until I send for you. I must think much. When I send for you I shall be very quiet. But do not come until I send for you."

She was always so silent and quietly aloof in her own home that her mother noticed no change in her. Her extreme pallor seemed to Madame Rupin the same that had always annoyed her. But Cecca saw—Cecca, the born mother, the only mother that the girl had ever known. It was revealed to the old nurse with every sharp, side glance which she took that there was something vitally wrong with her treasure. She dare not ask any questions. She knew Dione too well. She loved her too idolatrously to risk the grave, haughty look that she knew would fall upon her in that case. Heavy-hearted and fearful she went about her work, and many were the incantations against evil that she said, and many the

potent herbs that she slipped into the girl's food. But Dione did not eat. That seemed to Cecca the most terrible sign of all.

As for Kent, he passed those days in spaces of which men never speak do they return to the upper light. Even to recall them for an instant is to tempt God. "'If I go down into hell Thou art there also,'" he thought, in agony. "But this is the cellar of hell on which I lie broken. . . . God does not descend so low. . . ."

On the fourth day after his arrival Cecca came with another note from Dione. She wrote:

"Come to-night at midnight. I will be waiting in the pavilion. Dress warmly. I cannot light a fire, and it will be very cold. But we can see each other by the moonlight."

Kent shuddered. He had not been able to recall Dione's face since he left her, except with that terrible look upon it which made her seem to him a strange woman.

"I will come," was all that he wrote back.

On the afternoon of that same day Varoni came to Pallanza for a short visit. He went first to the Rupins, intending to see Kent as he returned. Like Cecca, he looked at Dione with that search-light of love which pierces all masks, and knew that she was very ill. He stayed with her only a short while. Then he found Cecca.

"I am alarmed about your young Signorina,"

said he. "I think that she is seriously ill. Has a doctor been consulted?"

"*Oh, Madonna mia! . . . Madonna mia!*" cried the old woman, lifting up her hands. "What is a poor, helpless old creature like me to do, Signore? . . . The child says that she is not ill and goes into a frozen rage at the mere mention. The mamma says that she is sulking. But if you, too, see it, Signore . . . Madonna have pity!"

"I do, indeed, see it," said Varoni. "But what, then, do you think this illness to be, Cecca?"

Suddenly, to his great distress, the old nurse flung her apron over her head and burst into a passion of weeping—that harsh, racked sobbing of the aged which is like the sight of a piteous deformity. As suddenly as she had broken down, however, she recovered herself, begged humbly to be pardoned.

"The Signore must indeed excuse me. . . .It is not only because my Signorina is ill that I forgot myself . . . but I have had bad news from my son in America this morning. My poor son . . . he, too, is very ill."

With the clairvoyance of love, Varoni instantly knew that she was lying. Why, he could not think. Then, all at once, he seized her arm. Even his lips were white.

"Cecca . . ." he said, hoarsely, and said no more.

Cecca began moving feverishly about the kitchen.

"Doubtless," said she, in a false note, "the Signore and I . . . a poor old *cretina* of a woman . . . yes, doubtless we exaggerate. . . . A little tonic is doubtless all that she needs. The Signore must not take things too seriously. . . . The Signore must not regard the nonsense of an old fool like me. The Signore . . ."

But Varoni had left the room.

His quick brain of the Latin had jumped to conclusions which even Cecca had not as yet dared to formulate precisely. He went and stood alone behind the shelter of the old box-trees in the garden, and rage and horror and anguish tore him as the evil spirits of old tore him who dwelt among the tombs. He remained there half an hour. Then he turned with a gesture full of force and decision, and went back to the house.

"Ask your Signorina if she will see me again for a few moments," he said, quietly, to Cecca. "I had forgotten something that I wish very much to say to her."

Dione came down at once to the little *salotto* to see him. Her eyes were still that light color of ashes, but her mouth was now like a fresh wound in her white face, so unnaturally vivid was it.

Varoni placed a chair for her, and remained standing in front of her.

"If you please," said Dione, gently, "do not keep me long. To-day I am rather tired."

"I will not keep you long, Signorina," said he. "What I have to say will take only a little time. First, I must ask your indulgence, however, and your permission to open a subject which I had not meant to mention so soon again."

"You may speak as you wish, Signore," said Dione.

"Then, Signorina, what I have to say is this. There come times to all of us, men and women, Signorina, when a true friend . . ." he choked suddenly over these words, and his face became livid; then he recovered himself, and went on with his usual quiet precision: ". . . when a true friend, Signorina, is the best gift that God can send. This true friend I am to you. Do you believe me when I say that I am your true friend?"

"Yes," said Dione, looking strangely at him.

"Then, Signorina, you will not be offended at what I am about to say to you. . . . It is this. Love between men and women is a very beautiful and wonderful thing, and it is well to marry for love. . . . But there come times . . . there come occasions when a husband who is a true friend can be more to a woman than father or mother or any other friend, no matter how devoted. . . . There come times—Signorina, I am asking you to let me be to you that husband who

is the true friend. . . . I am not asking for love . . . only that you should trust me enough to become my wife."

Then Dione knew that he knew, and yet that he was asking her to be his wife.

She rose to her feet and stood before him, looking straight into his eyes.

"Signore," said she, with a solemn quaintness, "it seems that I have entertained an angel unawares. You are a good and a great man. But I shall never marry. . . . I thank you. . . . I hope that you may find happiness."

Varoni lifted her loose sleeve, kissed it, and went away without another word.

When he opened Kent's door without knocking he found him seated beside the table with his head buried in his arms. Kent started to his feet with an exclamation of anger, and the two men stood looking at each other.

"I have come from the Rupins' . . ." said Varoni, slowly.

It was scarcely possible for Kent to look ghastlier, but his eyes quivered as before a threatened blow, though he did not lower them.

"Well?" he said.

"Will you swear to me," went on Varoni, still more slowly, "on your honour . . . on your mother's honour, that you have done no wrong to that young girl?"

Kent set his jaw. There was a scarcely perceptible pause. "I will swear it," he said, thickly.

"Then you are a coward and swear to a lie!" said Varoni.

Kent sprang toward him.

"Wait! . . ." said Varoni. "You are a spiritual coward, but not a physical coward. . . . Either you marry the Signorina Rupin immediately, or you fight with me."

Kent stood breathing sharply through his nostrils like a man who is taking ether. Then he said:

"You rush in, man . . . you rush in . . ."

"Will you marry her?"

"You fool!" cried Kent, his face dreadfully distorted. "Do you think I don't want to marry her? . . . Oh, you fool! . . . But I cannot. . . . I am married already."

They stood breathing hard, like two runners who have just raced with death. After a moment Varoni said:

"Then you will fight with me, and I shall kill you."

"As you like," said Kent, and he laughed.

Varoni left the room.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE midnight was bitter cold. From the black purple of the sky the stars shot down stalactites of frozen light. A thick fell of snow wrapped the Sasso di Ferro. Underfoot there was a glare of ice.

Kent knocked softly at the door of the pavilion. As before, Dione opened it herself. She stood at the end of an oblong of chill moonlight cast by the opposite window. A long, dark cloak wrapped her from head to foot.

"Are you very cold?" she asked, when he had entered.

And he answered:

"Yes, Dione. . . . I am cold in body and soul."

"I am not cold," said she, but the hand that he ventured to take was like ice. It lay passive in his. She herself seemed all passive. They stood together a few moments in silence, and Kent chafed the icy hand.

After a while he said:

"What have you to tell me, Dione?"

"Not very much," she answered. Her voice

was passive also. "Perhaps," she added, a second later, "you will laugh at me?"

"O Dione! . . ."

"You will please to excuse me. You see, I do not know any longer the things at which you will laugh and the things at which you will not laugh."

"Dione! . . ." he groaned again.

"I hope, however, that you will not laugh at this," she continued, with the same passivity, "because I have set my heart on it."

It seemed to him that the look she gave him in the moonlight had a sort of shiftiness in it, utterly unlike any look that he had ever seen in her before.

"I could not laugh at anything that you might say to me, Dione," he said, brokenly.

"You cannot tell beforehand."

"Yes . . . yes, I can tell!" he cried, with an almost angry passion. "Say that I am a scoundrel, . . . but I am a scoundrel who loves you. You cannot doubt that I love you! . . . You cannot doubt that, Dione!"

"Why, I doubt God," said she, and smiled.

Kent stood wordless.

"Will you tell me now?" he asked, presently, in a dead voice.

"Yes," she answered. "Sit here."

He sat facing her on the little rustic bench where he used to rest in the pauses of their

fencing lessons. The moonlight struck along the foils which still hung crossed on the opposite wall.

She kept her face out of the direct rays, but the light was so brilliant and permeating that he could see her distinctly. He thought again that she looked at him craftily . . . all unlike the Dione that he had once known—or had thought that he knew so well. And it occurred to him for the first time that she might be really ill.

"Are you well wrapped up? . . . Is it not too cold for you here?" he asked, anxiously.

"No. . . . It could not be too cold for me," answered she, and she put up one hand to her forehead.

"Are you well? . . . Do you feel quite well?" persisted Kent, his heart racked.

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Quite well enough," she said, with a sort of impatience, then caught herself quickly . . . smiled in that stiff way which was so painful to him, and which made her unsharing eyes stare hardly. "Please to listen . . ." she said, speaking slowly. "Please not to interrupt me."

"No . . . I will not interrupt you, Dione."

"Very well, then." (How the customary little phrase which she had so often used to him in other days cut to his soul's marrow!)

He drew a long, catching breath, but she went on, not heeding him.

"Very well, then," she said again. "This it is. I have been thinking very much . . . very hard. . . ." She knotted her black brows and looked past him. "Very hard, indeed. . . . I have remembered all that you said when you were here the other day. . . . I have said it over and over to myself until I know it like . . . like a poem. Yes . . . like a poem. . . ."

Kent shivered.

"And this is what I say to you in return."

She paused a moment, and then continued, in the voice of one saying something by rote:

"If you will come with me to Pan's Mountain to-night and swear to marry me when you are free . . . I will . . . accept it."

He felt that she purposely did not say "believe it."

"You know that I will do it, Dione."

"I could not know what you would do."

He kept a miserable silence.

"You will go, then?" she asked, after a moment.

"Yes, Dione. I have said so already."

"Now?"

"Now."

"Come, then," she said, and stood up.

"Have you the wine?" he asked, looking about him.

"No, . . . we do not need wine. We will not make libation. You have only to stand where

I show you and swear there what you said to me."

"Shall we go, then?"

"Yes, . . . let us go."

They went together down the mountain-side, often slipping on the ice-sheeted stones. She let him hold her up without remonstrance, but never reached to him for support. It seemed to Kent a long, long way to the shore. Once he stopped and cried out to her, in an anguish of appeal:

"Dione! . . . Dione! . . . come to me once in the old way! . . . Kiss me once . . . once only, for, indeed, I think my heart is broken within me!"

She stopped also, and stood looking at him curiously.

"I know, . . ." she said, when he had finished. "One feels the two edges grating together, does not one? . . . I always thought that hearts were soft before . . . did not you?"

He gazed at her in alarm.

"Oh, you *are* ill!" he said.

She looked scared for a moment, then a sort of sly, wheedling look crept over her face. She sidled up to him.

"You may kiss me," she said.

Kent sickened. The night went black before him for a moment, then he took her in his arms. As the supple figure melted against his he bent

in a sort of wounded fury of love and pressed down his lips on hers. But it was like kissing ashes. Her parched mouth was like a cinder burned out. His blood returned on itself in thick waves. He staggered, and for an instant she held him up with a strong grasp.

"Let us go on," he said at last, hoarsely.

When they reached the shore Dione went herself to fetch her boat from the buoy.

"I wish to get it, . . . and I wish to row there . . . to the mountain. It will keep me from being cold."

And again there was that crafty expression in her eyes. They rowed as they had walked—in silence. Kent did not attempt to take the oars from her, because he thought, in truth, that the exercise was better for her during the long crossing in such cold.

They touched the liquid, black shadow, entered it. Before long they were among the gnarls of ice-sheathed rock at the Sasso's base.

She looked up along the mountain as she rowed, and now Kent recalled how once he had compared her in his thought to a white hawk, so keen and shrewd was her gaze. All her face seemed pinched with it. She rowed slowly beside the grim base . . . paused . . . rowed on . . . paused again.

"You have passed the place where we stopped before," he said, gently.

"I know . . . I know . . ." she said, and her voice sounded a little breathless.

"Won't you let me take the oars now for a little? . . . It seems to me that you are tired."

"No. . . . No. . . . I am not tired. . . . Where is it? Where is it? . . . Ah! . . ."

She trailed one oar in the water, bringing the boat about. Its bow went with a crunching sound among the icy pebbles.

"But, Dione, . . ." said Kent, anxiously, "this is such a steep place. . . . We shall have to climb to that ledge there. . . . It seems to me rather dangerous. . . ."

"No! . . . No! . . ." insisted she, still with that breathless note in her voice. "It is just the place! . . . See, . . . I am out! . . . Now do you come too!"

He got out beside her. She had made the painter fast. She lifted herself and looked all about her, and then up.

"That is the place! . . ." she said, and pointed.

His eyes followed her directing hand. A sort of rough, natural stairway led to a ledge of rock just above them. This ledge was about three feet in width, and jutted from the sheer cliff. Below were the humped backs of sunken rocks and the unplumbed depths.

"But, Dione, . . . I assure you . . . it is dangerous," he said again.

"No, . . ." she said, feverishly, and a sort of angry gleam came into her uplifted eyes. "No. . . . It is just the place. . . . It is just the place. . . . Go first. . . . I will follow you."

"Very well," said Kent, fearing to excite her, for he now realized that she was very ill indeed.

He mounted the little stairway, and went out upon the ledge.

"Be very careful how you follow me!" he called back to her. "It is so narrow here that I am afraid to turn to help you. . . ."

She did not answer him. He heard that she was panting as she clambered up, and he longed to help her, but the foothold was too precarious. He even took a cautious step or two backward that she might not have room to advance far along that perilous shelf. And he looked up at the solemn night with its hosts of armored stars wheeling in gigantic silence to their duty, and felt that he had missed his way, and become less than star, less than man . . . a wandering atom . . . a pinch of poisonous dust. . . . These bitter thoughts surged through him, then suddenly—thought was done for him. A strong force pressed violently against him from the back. . . . He stumbled . . . recovered a little . . . fell forward through the bleak air. . . . His head struck against one of the half-submerged rocks. He sank like a plummet, without a cry . . . without a struggle.

Dione stood, bent far forward, gazing down. Her face was empty of all expression. She stood thus for several seconds, but there was no stir or sound of any sort save the low "glucking" of the dark water in the caverns just below her.

Presently she lifted her head, and, setting both hands against her breast, drew a long, painful breath.

"It is over . . ." she said.

She went down the little stairway, untied the boat, stepped into it. She stood there for another moment, and looked up at the huge mass, all shagged with snow, that rose above her.

"Pan, . . ." she said, ". . . I have given him back to you. . . ."

Then she took up the oars and rowed steadily and swiftly back to the other shore. When she rose to lift out the cushions something fell tinkling at her feet. She stooped and raised it. It was the little silver pencil that she knew so well. She looked at it curiously for a moment, then tossed it out into the lake. It made a white streak in the moonlight, then vanished.

Cecca was not asleep, though it was nearly four o'clock, for Masciett kept whining and scratching at her door. She got up at last, lighted a candle, and let him in. No sooner was he across the threshold than he ran questing about the room, sniffing at bed and chairs and tables. . . . He

was hunting his mistress, who had locked him into the house, but that Cecca could not know.

"*Santa Maria!* . . . The beast acts as though he were bewitched," thought she, and "made horns" against him, and crossed herself many times.

"*Sta quièt!* . . . *Sta quièt!*" (Be still! . . . Be still!) she called to him. But he circled and circled, and at last sat on his haunches before her and lifted up his muzzle with his wild, wolf tremolo.

"Madonna save and protect us all!" exclaimed Cecca, really frightened.

Suddenly the dog stiffened . . . cocked his head, then flung himself furiously against the closed door, whining and slavering with excitement.

Cecca stood frozen. Then she heard Dione's voice saying:

"Let me in! . . . I am cold! . . . Let me in! . . . I am cold!"

Cecca rushed to the door. She flung it open, and saw Dione standing on the threshold fully dressed, a long cloak shrouding her, and her face like a dead face.

"*O Signor! O Madonna!* . . ." cried her nurse. "Why are you like that? . . . What has happened?"

Dione stood, and stared at her.

Cecca seized her wrist, and shook her.

"Speak! . . . speak! . . ." said she. "Have you been out into the night alone? . . . Was the Signore with you? . . . Where is the Signore?"

That cunning, crafty look stole into the girl's face.

"*Sh!*" said she, with her finger at her lips. "That is Pan's secret. . . ."

"*Dio mio! Dio mio!* It is my belief that you are in a raving fever. . . . No . . . Madonna! for you are colder than a corpse. . . . Sit here. . . . Do as I bid you. . . . Now drink this wine. . . ."

The girl took a few swallows with great difficulty, obedient from the long habit of childhood. Then she sat quite silent in a corner of the chimney, huddled among the warm coverings that Cecca had heaped about her, staring into the just-kindled blaze of pine cones.

"O blessed Virgin! . . ." groaned the other, distracted. "O Mary Mother, grant that she be not going mad! . . . Never have I seen till now such a look in the eyes of any creature. . . ."

Suddenly Dione bent that look on her.

"Now, Cecca," she said, fretfully, "please bring me my baby! . . . Please give him to me, Cecca! . . . I want to nurse him. . . . You always keep him so long. . . . You are jealous because all your sons are grown. . . . Please give me my baby, Cecca dear! . . . I am so cold. . . . It will warm me to hold him. . . . And I am lonely. . . . Please, dear Cecca! . . ."

Cecca stared for a moment at the extended, empty arms, at the empty, hungry eyes; then she threw herself down upon the stone floor and tore at her gray hair.

Dione watched her listlessly.

"Please get up and give me my baby, Cecca! . . ." she kept saying. "I am so lonely! . . ."

Far back in the high foothills of the Italian Alps, above Lago Maggiore, an old and a young woman live together in a little hut of stone such as are built on those uplands. The only man of their household is a big dog whom the peasants thereabout call "The White Wolf." They have a bit of grass-land and keep two cows. The old woman tends the house and dairy, and goes down to the valley to sell the milk and butter. The young woman helps in these matters sometimes, but chiefly she watches the cows and tosses the new-mown hay—for she loves best to be out-of-doors. Besides, she is vacant and entirely listless unless her boy is either in her arms or lying near her where she can watch him when she is working. The dog is not jealous of the child, though he follows its mother like a white shadow, but will sit guarding it for hours as it lies on a haymow while its mother tosses up the fragrant grass. Does any venture too near he lifts a threatening lip and shows his fangs, growling slightly.

The young woman is very pale, with a crown of black flame-like hair. When she smiles and nurses her baby she is beautiful. The peasants call her "*La Bella Matta*" (The Beautiful Mad-girl), and cross themselves as she goes by with The White Wolf at her side, singing or talking to her boy. He crows and leaps against her breast in answer, and she lets him pull out handfuls of her splendid hair without wincing.

Sometimes she stands quite still and looks down at him wistfully, saying: "I have forgotten thy name, my treasure. But God has it written down somewhere. Cecca told me about it."

Oftenest she sings to him, though. Strange lullabys they are. The peasants, listening, cross themselves again. And the one she sings most frequently has a wild, piteous refrain:

"*Why are thy long black tresses always dripping, O maiden?*
My hair is wet with my tears and the water that drowned my lover."

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